

**28th
ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

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producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



How Retailers Can Capitalize On **FARMERS MARKET FERVOR**

INSIDE:



THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT FOOD SAFETY AND TAYLOR FARMS • WAL-MART
PRICING REPORT • HIGHLAND PARK • CONSUMER PACKAGING • BERRY IMPORTS
CALIFORNIA CITRUS • FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE • WHOLESALERS • WEST MEXICO
RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES • SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES • APPLES
NEW SALAD TRENDS • ORGANIC BERRIES • REGIONAL PROFILE: TWIN CITIES • PECANS

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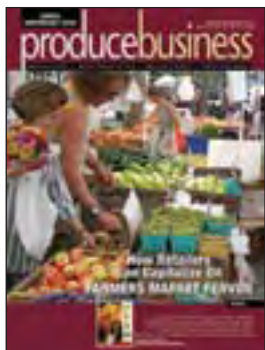


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Asian Blend

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European flavors

For your healthy lifestyle!



A message from Europe

Since 2008, the European Flavors program has been present at the top trade shows in the produce industry, organized in-store promotions and developed an entire campaign highlighting and promoting the qualities found in fruits and vegetables from Europe in the U.S. The program's success has exceeded our expectations.

We are happy to announce the renewal of the program with commitment from the European Union, the Italian Ministry of Agricultural Affairs and support from the Centro Servizi Ortofruticoli.

The program will continue to promote the extraordinary quality of both fresh and processed produce grown in compliance with strict European directives -safeguarding the environment, health and safety of the consumers.

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Joel Salazar
Sales
Western Fresh Marketing
Madera, CA

Joel Salazar describes his start in the produce industry as happening "rather by chance." Salazar originally worked in jewelry, then construction, and now he has been working in sales for 13 years at Western Fresh Marketing in Madera, CA.

"We are a shipper/marketer of domestic and imported tropicals and exotics," says Salazar, who is part of a five-salesmen team at Western Fresh Marketing.

Salazar reveals how his new career at Western Fresh Marketing happened by

chance. "My wife was asked by the manager here, Chris Kragie, to be the godmother of his two oldest kids," says Salazar. "That afternoon I got to know Chris, and met his father, George Kragie, who is the owner of the company."

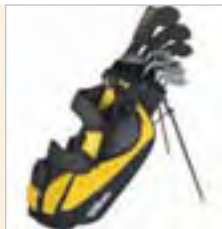
Since working in the produce industry, Salazar reads *PRODUCE BUSINESS* whenever he sees it in the office.

"I like reading up on the different areas and learning about what's happening in the produce world," says Salazar. He adds that the magazine gives him insight as to how the industry is evolving.

How To Win! To win the *PRODUCE BUSINESS* Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our December issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

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QUESTIONS FOR THE OCTOBER ISSUE

- 1) What is the phone number for Kern Ridge Growers? _____
- 2) What's the booth number for European Flavors at PMA Fresh Summit? _____
- 3) What kind of products is displayed in the Marzetti ad? _____
- 4) What are the two main attributes of Go Veggie products in their ad? _____
- 5) How many weeks per year are the onion programs at Curry & Company? _____
- 6) What company is advertising Argentina blueberries? _____

This issue was: ☐ Personally addressed to me ☐ Addressed to someone else

Name _____ Position _____
Company _____
Address _____
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Phone _____ Fax _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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People Who Know

OCTOBER 18 - 20, 2013

PMA FRESH SUMMIT CONVENTION & EXPO

Conference Venue: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, LA

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone: (302) 738-7100

Fax: (302) 731-2409

E-mail: jmickel@pma.com

Website: freshsummit.com

OCTOBER 28 - 29, 2013

THE 17TH AMERICAS FOOD AND BEVERAGE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami Beach, FL

Conference Management: World Trade Center Miami, Miami, FL

Phone: (703) 259-6120

Fax: (703) 934-4899

E-mail: afb@naylor.com

Website: americasfoodandbeverage.com

NOVEMBER 7 - 9, 2013

45TH NOGALES PRODUCE CONVENTION AND GOLF TOURNAMENT

Conference Venue: Rio Rico Resort & Tubac Golf Resort, Rio Rico, AZ

Conference Management: Fresh Produce Association of the America, Nogales, AZ

Phone: (520) 287-2707

Fax: (520) 287-2948

E-mail: aadams@freshfrommexico

Website: freshfrommexico.com

NOVEMBER 10 - 13, 2013

WESTERN GROWERS ANNUAL MEETING

Conference Venue: Sheraton Resort, Waikiki, HAWAII

Conference Management: Western Growers Association, Newport Beach, CA

Phone: (949) 863-1000

Fax: (949) 863-9028

E-mail: info@wga.com

Website: wgannualmeeting.com

DECEMBER 10 - 12, 2013

NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Pier 94, New York, NY

Conference Management: PRODUCE BUSINESS, Boca Raton, FL

Phone: (561) 994-1118

Fax: (561) 994-1610

E-mail: info@nyproduceshow.com

Website: nyproduceshow.com

JANUARY 8 - 10, 2014

POTATO EXPO 2014

Conference Venue: Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, San Antonio, TX

Conference Management: National Potato Council, Washington DC

Phone: (202) 682-9456 **Fax:** (202) 682-0333

E-mail: hollee@nationalpotatocouncil.com

Website: potato-expo.com

JANUARY 9 - 12, 2014

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLE CONFERENCE 2014

Conference Venue: Savannah International Trade & Convention Center, Savannah, GA

Conference Management: Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association,

LaGrange, GA

Phone: (877) 994-3842

Fax: (706) 883-8215

E-mail: gkey@asginfo.net

Website: seregionalconference.com

JANUARY 15 - 17, 2014

PMA EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM 2014

Conference Venue: Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, Orlando, FL

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone: (302) 738-7100

Fax: (302) 731-2409

E-mail: lfisher@pma.com

Website: pma.com

JANUARY 19 - 21, 2014

WINTER FANCY FOOD SHOW 2014

The 39th Winter Fancy Food Show is the West Coast's largest specialty food and beverage event.

Conference Venue: Moscone Center, San Francisco, CA

Conference Management: Specialty Food Association, New York, NY

Phone: (212) 482-6440

Fax: (212) 482-6555

E-mail: erivera@nasft.org

Website: fancyfoodshows.com

JANUARY 19 - 21, 2014

SWEET POTATO CONVENTION 2014

Conference Venue: Royal Sonesta Hotel, New Orleans, LA

Conference Management: United States Sweet Potato Council, Columbia, SC

Phone: (803) 788-7101

Fax: (803) 788-7101

E-mail: ThornhillFarms@hotmail.com

Website: sweetpotatousa.org

JANUARY 22 - 24, 2014

TPIE - TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXHIBITION 2014

Conference Venue: Broward County Convention Center, Ft Lauderdale, FL

Conference Management: Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Association, Orlando, FL

Phone: (407) 295-7994

E-mail: shaines@fngla.org

Website: fngla.org

JANUARY 28 - 30, 2014

HOTEL, MOTEL & RESTAURANT SUPPLY SHOW SOUTHEAST 2014

Conference Venue: Myrtle Beach Convention Center, Myrtle Beach, SC

Conference Management: Leisure Time Unlimited, Inc., Myrtle Beach, SC

Phone: (843) 448-9483

Fax: (843) 626-1513

E-mail: hmrss@sc.rr.com

Website: hmrss.com

FEBRUARY 5 - 7, 2014

FRUIT LOGISTICA 2014

The world's leading trade fair for the fresh fruit and vegetable business.

Conference Venue: Berlin Exhibition Fairgrounds Hall 1- 25, Berlin, Germany

Conference Management: Messe Berlin GmbH, Berlin, Germany

Phone: 493-030-382048

E-mail: central@messe-berlin.de

Website: fruitlogistica.com

FEBRUARY 9 - 12, 2014

NATIONAL GROCERS ASSOCIATION (NGA) SHOW 2014

NGA show — where independents gather.

Conference Venue: The Mirage Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV

Conference Management: National Grocers Association, Arlington, VA

Phone: (703) 516-0700

Fax: (703) 516-0115

E-mail: ccunnick@nationalgrocers.org

Website: nationalgrocers.org

FEBRUARY 12 - 14, 2014

BIOFACH 2014 INTO ORGANIC

Conference Venue: Exhibition Centre, Nuremberg, Germany

Conference Management: NürnbergMesse GmbH, Nürnberg, Germany

Phone: +49 (0) 9 11.86 06-89 96

Website: biofach.com

FEBRUARY 19 - 23, 2014

NATIONAL WATERMELON CONVENTION 2014

Conference Venue: Marriott Riverfront Resort & Spa, Savannah, GA

Conference Management: National Watermelon Association, Inc., Lakeland, FL

Phone: (863) 619-7575

Fax: (863) 619-7577

E-mail: bmmorrissey@tampabay.rr.com

Website: nationalwatermelonassociation.com

FEBRUARY 26 - 28, 2014

GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE 2014

Conference Venue: Hilton, Anaheim, CA

Conference Management: Consumer Goods Forum, Issy-les-Moulineaux, France

Phone: (+33) 1 82 00 95 85

E-mail: foodsafety@theconsumergoodsforum.com

Website: ciesnet.com

FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 1, 2014

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE 2014

Conference Venue: Caribe Royal Resort & Conference Center, Orlando, FL

Conference Management: Southeast Produce Council, Inc., East Ellijay, GA

Phone: (706) 276-4025

Fax: (866) 653-4479

E-mail: info@seproducecouncil.com

Website: seproducecouncil.com

MARCH 2 - 4, 2014

CANADIAN RESTAURANT AND FOODSERVICE ASSOCIATION (CRFA) SHOW

Convention Venue: Direct Energy Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Convention Management: Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association, Toronto, Mississauga

Phone: (416) 649-4237

Fax: (416) 923-6164

E-mail: nmestnik@crfa.ca

Website: crfa.ca

To submit events to our Forward Thinking calendar, please e-mail info@producebusiness.com.



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WHAT HAPPENS IF CONGRESS CAN'T PASS A FARM BILL?

By Robert Guenther,
United Fresh Senior Vice President of Public Policy

The battles being waged in Congress to pass a Farm Bill will unfortunately continue for quite a while. The Senate was able to pass a comprehensive Farm Bill before the recess, but the House took a different tact and instead took the rare step of passing an agriculture-only version of the Farm Bill. The House stripped out provisions for nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This atypical approach to U.S. farm and food policy produced different reactions. In an interview earlier this summer, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) said that passing the split version of the bill was a step forward. The "Republican majority for the first time says we don't like the way things have been done in Washington," said Cantor, adding that the House will bring forward a nutrition bill under Chairman Frank D. Lucas' leadership that links food stamps to work requirements.

"We want the people who need those food stamp benefits to get them. But you know what? It's an issue of fairness. If they are able-bodied people who can work, they ought to do that in order to receive a government benefit. That's the proposal we are bringing forward," said Cantor. However, the Republicans' proposed nutrition bill would cut \$40 billion over a decade from SNAP, a measure of which is likely to meet strong resistance from House Democrats as well as members of the Senate.

How will the produce industry be affected by the two versions of the Farm Bill passed by the House and Senate? While much debate raged on about the House's split version of the Farm Bill compared to the comprehensive Senate version, both bills include provisions on fruits and vegetables that are aligned with the produce industry's priorities. Both the House and Senate versions of the production agriculture provisions reflect our industry's needs for research, pest and disease mitigation, trade, nutrition and grants to enhance the ability of producers to be competitive and meet the needs

of American consumers.

More specifically, the House version provides up to \$65 million per year for specialty crop research; \$75 million annually for pest and disease mitigation; \$200 million for key trade provisions; and \$150 million per year for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) for underserved schoolchildren; and up to \$85 million for Specialty Crop Block Grants. For those programs, the Senate respectively allocated a high of \$65 million for pest and disease programs; \$200 million for trade opportunities; \$150 million for FFVP; and \$70 million for Block Grants.

The differences between these two versions of specialty crop provisions could easily be resolved and result in increased resources for fruit and vegetable producers. The bottom line is an additional \$1 billion in new resources over the life of a multi-year Farm Bill reauthorization are at stake for the produce industry if the new farm bill is not passed.

The critical question becomes how long will it take for the Congress to pass a Farm Bill? Unfortunately, the answer at this point is far from clear. A Farm Bill probably won't be passed until the end of 2013, and perhaps with the continued contention surrounding the House's version of the bill, that may be extended into 2014 with some talk around Capitol Hill of an even longer extension.

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank D. Lucas (R-OK) issued a statement saying that he looks forward to working with colleagues in the House and Senate toward "a

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY TELL THEIR CONGRESSMEN AND WOMEN THAT A TRUE REAUTHORIZATION, NOT AN EXTENSION, OF THE FARM BILL NEEDS TO BE PASSED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

path that ultimately gets a Farm Bill to the President's desk in the coming months."

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Chairwoman, Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), said in a statement that she was less optimistic concerning the House's bill. Stabenow said that the bill passed by the House "is not a real Farm Bill and is an insult to rural America." Stabenow went on to say that they will go to conference with the "bipartisan, comprehensive Farm Bill that was passed in the Senate; a bill that not only reforms programs, supports families in need and creates agriculture jobs, but also saves billions more than the extremely flawed House bill."

What happens if Congress can't pass a Farm Bill? If a Farm Bill is not passed, then some of the current provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill that were extended for a year will expire. However, there are programs of great interest to the produce industry that would not have continued legal authority under a basic extension — meaning that while it may sound simple, another extension is not a good thing for our industry.

It is essential that the produce industry tell their Congressmen and women that a true reauthorization, not an extension, of the Farm Bill needs to be passed as soon as possible. One way you can get your voice heard is to send Congress an e-mail from the United Fresh Grassroots Action Network. Learn more about sending your Congressmen and women an e-mail through the Grassroots Action Network at capwiz.com/unitedfresh/home/.



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Enthusiastic In More Ways Than One

With the very first issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, launched 28 years ago to the day at the PMA convention in San Francisco, we began what would become a tradition: To set aside one page, to write a Special Note — a report on the status of our enterprise. It is our annual gesture of a tremendous respect for you, the reader, and for all who make what we do possible.

Indeed, publishing is an odd game. We put ideas, interpretation, data and analysis out there and then we wait. For it is your decision to utilize these ideas in your work that gives life and meaning to the dry ink on our pages.

Of course, nowadays we are so much more than ink on the page. There are electrons on screens zipping through the ether, digital editions, e-newsletters, the *Perishable Pundit* and *PerishableNews.com*; then there are the events, from trade shows and conferences, to share groups, and strategic planning, speeches, consulting and teaching.

In a sense, we are a world away from those days 28 years ago when we had just paper and ink, when we ran cover stories reporting on the “Fax Auction” — a new phenomenon in the industry in which buyers were inundated with daily offers via fax.

Yet, in the essence, it is not so different. Our specialty today, as it was the day we launched, is not to uncover scandalous secrets; it is to identify and define the meaning and significance of events. We then use that information to help people do business better and help the industry, as a whole, to prosper and grow.

So the function is ideas, but ideas are meaningless without people; so, *de facto*, what we do in print, online and in person, is to find ways for the best ideas and the

smartest people to meet.

That is one way that things have changed in the past 28 years. We’ve become more knowledgeable and experienced, and now our “Golden Rolodex” is filled with brilliant people from every corner of the globe. So our ideas are better and associates smarter.

When one thinks of what to thank people for — associates, vendors, customers, and readers — a big part of it is just the fact that we are still here. It is difficult to overstate the importance placed on the fact that we built this company from scratch. It is one thing to think one has clever ideas, but there is something about having had to sweat out a payroll that concentrates the mind powerfully on the practical.

Yet one thing we never regretted is the time we spent on the thoroughly tangential. Whether it has been going to conferences on the other end of the Earth where we have no business to do, or starting magazines in other fields outside of produce where we knew very little, or attending trade shows without a known agenda or reading books or taking courses with no known connection to anything relevant. Few moments are as joyous as sharing a meal or having some time with someone we get a chance to know well. Some people say they do their best thinking when completely at rest; we have found that exposure to new ideas, to stimulating thoughts, leads to better thinking.

PRODUCE BUSINESS has always been dedicated to finding ways to help the industry grow. And for 2014, we are taking it to a whole new level. For the trade, we are thrilled to announce that we have joined hands with The Fresh Produce Consortium to announce the launch of The London Produce Show and Conference. This high-end, world-class event will celebrate the impor-

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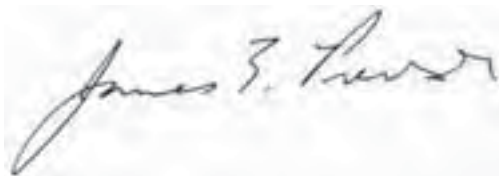
tance of produce trade in the United Kingdom, long among the most forward-thinking produce sectors on the globe, yet present this salute in the context of a broader trade show and conference that looks at the U.K. and Europe as a crucial destination for shippers worldwide.

This new industry institution combines with The New York Produce Show and Conference, which we hold with the Eastern Produce Council to cement a transatlantic exchange of ideas and friendship.

In 2014 we will also see the launch of a new magazine in both print and digital formats. It is a hybrid publication that will be read by everyone who is anyone in the trade, but it will be in every Barnes & Noble, every Hudson News outlets at airports and commuter outlets, it will be in many supermarkets, and digital editions will be available on Apple and Android devices.

In other words, it is the industry’s first consumer magazine. It is called *PRODUCE ENTHUSIAST*, and in an age where every shipper and retailer is using social media and websites to reach out to consumers, it is going to help consumers know how to use more and enjoy more fruits and vegetables.

As for the title, well what can we say? After 28 years we remain, as we began, a true *PRODUCE ENTHUSIAST*. **pb**



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Fran Gruskin Retires

EDITOR'S NOTE: In April of this year, Fran Gruskin, a larger-than-life fixture in the offices of PRODUCE BUSINESS, and in the halls of the PMA Convention for the past 25 years, retired to spend more time with her family and friends.

The April 11 edition of sister publication, *Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit*, published a fitting tribute to Fran with this paragraph written by Jim Prevor:

Fran didn't go to Harvard, and she never became a CEO. She isn't super-rich and never became famous, but her quarter-century association with me and this company serves as an impressive reminder of the impact all of us can have on the lives of



those we care about. Fran has, indeed, filled the lives of many with joy, but she has also taught me, and all who wish to see it, an important lesson about our ability to make all the difference for those we love.

Below are a few of the many letters we received at PRODUCE BUSINESS in response to the news:

Jim Prevor wrote quite a well deserved tribute to Fran Gruskin. I visit with Jim at PMA conventions, but now, from Jim's comments, I feel I also know Fran.

— Al Lanfeld
President
Garner-Lanfeld Packaging,
Los Angeles, CA

I just read Jim Prevor's piece on Fran's retirement. It gave me so much more than I ever knew about her. Wow!

Jim was so lucky to have Fran by his side. Hoping Fran enjoys a slower pace in retirement.

— Bryan Silbermann
President/CEO
Produce Marketing Association
Newark, DE

I just read in the PUNDIT that Fran Gruskin really is going to retire to "enjoy" life. Well, I applaud her and know PB will be the loser in this endeavor!

I truly hope Fran will go out and enjoy the beautiful sunset of her life. She was always such a great worker as well as tough and aggressive in what she wanted for her boss — the best type of assistant ever. I hope PRODUCE BUSINESS can find another even remotely as good and funny.

— Veronica A. Kraushaar
President
VIVA International Partners, Inc.
Nogales, AZ

Making A Better Industry

As a fan of many years, I congratulate Jim Prevor and PRODUCE BUSINESS on another well-deserved recognition of excellence in journalism [as a repeat winner of the Jesse H. Neal Award].

Journalists who depend on an industry for their livelihoods tread a very high wire in covering that industry. I imagine the temptation to self-edit one's production in order to curry favor, or at least avoid conflict with the powerful people and companies in the production is ever-present, but I have never seen any signs of it in Jim's editorials.

"Thought-provoking" is exactly what trade journalism should be, and PRODUCE BUSINESS has consistently delivered. From Wal-Mart's corporate responsibilities to the clumsy PMA-UFGA merger missteps, to the topic of trade show propriety, PRODUCE BUSINESS has gone where others might have held back. By doing so, you and your team encouraged professionals to take a stand, make a statement, and contribute to a dialog that can't fail to make ours a better industry.

— Doug Stoiber
Vice President, Produce Transportation
Operations
L&M Transportation Services, Inc.
Raleigh, NC



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One Of The Best Produce Articles Ever Read!

Reading the article in the July issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS about Hunts Point that Michael Femia wrote ["Hunts Point: The Heartbeat Of The Produce Industry In The Metro New York Region"] is probably one of the best produce articles I have ever read!

Not only did Michael do a fantastic job on reporting, but as I am reading it, I'm thinking this would be a great piece for the *Wall Street Journal*.

It has an outstanding beginning and end that's city-specific as far as the contribution

to the economy. And with a little editing on your part, taking out some industry-specific quotes and things like that, I think this could be a great way to bring some attention to the Hunts Point Market and the contribution the produce industry as a whole makes to the New York economy.

— Jeff Shilling
Vice President Procurement
RLB Food Distributors
West Caldwell, NJ

Giving Back

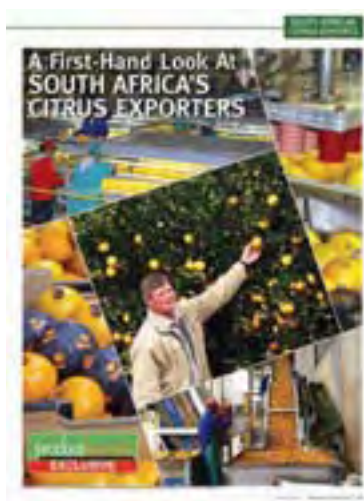
My congratulations to Ellen Rosenthal and her team for a job well done on the July Issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine. The article about the Little Sisters and the Queen of Peace Residence was very nice. I only heard positive feedback, and everyone remarked how well that story was written. Please also tell Michael Femia about how nice the photos he took came out.

Again, I am very grateful that PRODUCE

BUSINESS took the time to come here and let the people at the Hunts Point Market, and in the produce industry, know how much we appreciate whatever they give us.

God bless you!

— Sister Elisabeth Anne
Little Sisters of the Poor
Queens, NY



Remarkable Reporting On South African Citrus

I have just received and read the articles Mira Slott developed after her visit to South Africa ["A First-Hand Look At South Africa's Citrus Exporters," Part 1 and 2, published in the July and September issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS]:

The piece on Harvest of Hope, coupled with Part One on the overall South African citrus program to the United States, is simply remarkable reporting.

Staggering is the only word to describe the manner in which you captured with accuracy, detail, and passion the story of the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum.

Well done!

— Lisa Packer
Root Strategies
Wayne, PA



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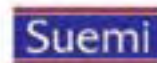
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Little Princess



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Suemi



TRANSITIONS

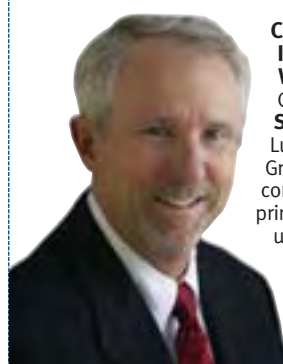


MANN PACKING COMPANY SALINAS, CA

Mann Packing Company hires **Kim St. George** as the company's new director of marketing and innovation. St. George has more than 20 years experience in the fresh produce industry. At Mann Packing, St. George directs the new product development team and provide category management and consumer insights for new item innovation.

CKF INC. HANTSPORT, NS

CKF Inc. — One of Canada's leading food packaging companies — appoints **Shannon Boase** as director, new market development. Boase will continue to oversee the brand vision of Earthcycle Packaging within CKF Inc. Boase founded Earthcycle in 2005, which has been awarded and recognized among peers for its development of innovative packaging made from palm fibre.



COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL WENATCHEE, WA

Columbia Marketing International hires **Steve Lutz** as vice president of marketing. Lutz transitioned from Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago-based marketing and consulting firm that he co-founded. His primary work involved helping organizations understand and merge consumer information and supermarket sales data to develop innovative growth strategies.

CHURCH BROTHERS SALINAS, CA

Church Brothers continues to expand its sales team by adding **Rochelle Welsh** as sales assistant. Welsh will work out of Church Brothers' Salinas, CA, office. Welsh received her associate's degree in business administration from Monterey Peninsula College. She recently graduated from Claremont McKenna College with a degree in psychology. Welsh will report to Jeff Church and assist with account management and customer service.



RITEWAY LAKELAND, FL

Riteway welcomes **Don Bishop** to the team of professionals to lead and develop Riteway's new Riteway Fresh division. He assumes the role of director of Riteway's Fresh division. Bishop's experience on the produce side of the consumer package goods and fresh produce industry made him the lead contender for the task.

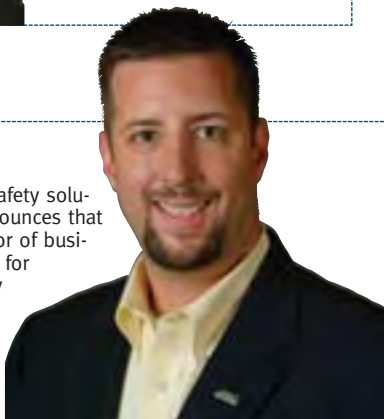


MARKET FRESH PRODUCE NIXA, MO

Market Fresh Produce's **Jordan Jackson** is promoted to senior director of finance. Jackson joined Market Fresh in 2010 as accounting manager directly after graduating from Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar MO. Jackson will have direct responsibility of the financial business in both the Florida and Missouri offices of Market Fresh.

BIRKO HENDERSON, CO

Birko, a leading provider of food safety solutions for the produce industry, announces that **Ian Bessell** joins the firm as director of business development and food safety for produce. Bessell was most recently the business development director of produce and seafood for ABC Research Laboratories, Gainesville, FL.



TOM LANGE COMPANY, INC SPRINGFIELD, IL

Tom Lange Company, Inc.'s **Becky Wilson** is promoted to vice president of operations. Wilson has been with Tom Lange Company since 1991 and previously served as its assistant vice president of administration. Wilson has a strong background in the produce industry and served as a member of the United Fresh Produce Association's Wholesaler-Distributor Board from 2011 to 2013.



GILLS ONIONS OXNARD, CA

Gills Onions, a California-based market leader in fresh-cut onions, announces the addition of **Teri Trost** to the company's sales team. Trost has over 30 years of experience in foodservice sales management, customer service and marketing that includes new channel and new account development, as well as key account management. In her new role, Trost will focus on helping Gills Onions customers build their fresh-cut onion category sales and profits, via training, food show support and innovative promotional programs.



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SHANLEY FARMS AND DEL REY AVOCADO TEAM UP FOR PREMIUM MORRO BAY AVOCADOS

Shanley Farms of Morro Bay, CA, and Del Rey Avocado of Fallbrook, CA, are now shipping Morro Bay Avocados, which are solely grown in San Luis Obispo County, the northernmost avocado growing region in California. Morro Bay Avocados are supremely rich and creamy with exceptionally high oil content. Morro Bay Avocados are available now through November in multiple pack styles and sizes.



JEMD FARMS — THE GO-TO-TEAM IN GREENHOUSE CATEGORY

JemD Farms Red Sun and Golden Sun produce provides greenhouse perfection — all year long. The company is known in the industry as the greenhouse go-to-team, with six North American distribution centers and designated regional sales teams to support the greenhouse category needs including planning support, marketing support, and new product launch support.



RIVER POINT FARMS RECLAIMED BY HALE BROTHERS

River Point Farms, Hermiston, OR, announces that brothers, Bob and Rick Hale, buy back control of River Point Farms. The new River Point Farms was created by the merger of American Onion, Inc. and Rivergate Farms, LLC, with a major interest purchased by Dallas-based CIC Partners, a premier mid-market private equity firm. This transaction makes River Point Farms America's largest grower and processor of yellow, red and sweet onions — producing over 400 million pounds of onions this year.

INTERRUPCION PROGRAM HITS MAJOR CONSUMER HOT BUTTONS

Interrupcion's, Brooklyn, NY, Taste Me Do Good blueberry program presents a profitable opportunity for high quality product at promotable volumes during the fall/winter window. The program markets to several key factors important to today's consumers and offers a variety of promotional support including ready-to-go shelf talkers and display materials.



SOUTHERN SPECIALTIES EXPANDS GUATEMALA LIME DEAL

Southern Specialties, Inc., Pompano Beach, FL, expands the company's presence in Guatemala growing and shipping Persian limes. The company planted additional lime groves in the area of Petén where it will begin harvesting 450 hectares this season. Production from this area will reach 1,000 hectares by next year with total production from Guatemala at 2,000 hectares.



INTERGROW GREENHOUSES EXPANSION AND ADDITION

Intergrow Greenhouses, Inc., Albion, NY, is planning to start construction on the fourth phase of expansion this spring and the addition of lights in the greenhouse for winter production. The expansion will increase Intergrow's total acreage to approximately 80 acres of greenhouse under glass in the Northeast region. The expansion and addition of lights is projected to be ready for harvest in 2014.

READY PAC KEEPS UP WITH CONSUMER LABEL PERCEPTIONS

Ready Pac Foods, Inc., Irwindale, CA, monitors shifts in consumer awareness in order to differentiate itself from the growing number of brands promoting suspicious or misleading product claims.

Ready Pac Bistro Bowl Salads are produced in facilities that are USDA-certified and strive for both clean health and product transparency.



READY PAC LAUNCHES CONTEST FOR BISTRO BOWLS

Ready Pac Foods, Irwindale, CA, is leveraging its tech-savvy consumer base to promote usage of its Bistro Bowl Salad line this fall. To commence the official launch of its Instagram presence, Ready Pac is encouraging users to post a photo of themselves with Bistro Bowls using the hashtag #bistrobowl, and will be awarding one grand prize winner with a \$500 Visa gift card.



SOUTH AFRICAN SUMMER CITRUS CONTINUES POPULARITY IN STATES

South African Summer Citrus is at the halfway point in the summer citrus season. The category continues in high demand across the U.S. To date, more than 30,000 tons of citrus arrived in the U.S. This is the fourteenth season of citrus shipments from South Africa to the U.S. and average annually +/- 40,000 tons.

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BLACK GOLD FARMS HOSTS TOUR

Black Gold Farms, Grand Forks, ND, recently hosted five food bloggers at its farm in Arbyrd, MO, in the middle of harvest to provide a first-hand look at the process of growing and shipping fresh potatoes. This tour was just one part of Black Gold Farms efforts to establish relationships and create credibility with national food bloggers.

MASTRONARDI LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Gourmet greenhouse grower Mastronardi Produce Ltd./SUNSET Produce, Kingsville, ON, announces the launch of its all new, highly graphic and content-rich website. The entire website is outfitted with responsive coding, providing consumers and buyers optimal viewing experiences when seeking a resource for all-things greenhouse grown, environmentally conscious and "Inspired By Flavor."



OSCAR MACFRUT AWARDS FOR INNOVATION

Organized by Cesena Fiera, the Macfrut exhibition presented five Oscar Macfrut Awards for innovation: Ishida received the first category award for its RV Series, Carton Pack won a prize in packaging for its CP fresh technology, OrtoRomi won the third category prize for Topolina, and Polymer Logistics won the Oscar Logistica prize for Rattan Active Lock Rpc. The general prize was given to the Alma Mater Studiorum of Bologna.



SUN WORLD ADDS TWO PRODUCER-MARKETER LICENSEES.

Sun World International, LLC appoints two leaders in Central and South American agriculture, Camposol S.A. of Peru and Grupo Alta of Sonora Mexico, as grape producer-marketer licensees. Both companies have been granted rights to produce Sun World grape varieties in their respective countries, to distribute and market their fruit, and to use Sun World's brands in the marketplace.

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6TH ANNUAL AMHPAC CONFERENCE

Commitment to Strength

Protected agriculture group looks to diversify into international markets. **BY PRISCILLA LLERAS**



Industry leaders met in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, at the 6th Annual AMHPAC (Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture) Conference. With over 350 executives in attendance, the conference allowed AMHPAC membership and industry experts to discuss the association's commitment to strength. Attendees were given the opportunity to network with industry professionals during the conference and further personal dialogue about

the growth and potential of the protected agriculture industry.

A General Assembly started the event and was attended by partners, associates and sponsors of the AMHPAC, as well as the members of the Board of Directors for the Association. A panel discussion developed on the tomato dumping issue within the program of the event, attended by Martin Ley (Fresh Evolution), Mario Haroldo Robles Escalante

(CIDH-CAADES), German Gandara (Agricola Ganfer) and Carlos Espinoza (Agricola EPSA).

During the event, AMHPAC renewed its Board of Directors choosing Juan Ariel Reyes Rabago, director of Inposa, located in Municipio de San Felipe, Mexico, as president for the period 2013-2015.

The second day focused on an analysis of economic perspectives and trends of the agriculture sector. The Technical and Business sessions covered key current topics including:

- Proposed rules under the Food Safety Modernization Act
- Protection of horticulture in Mexico
- Setting a business strategy in the largest consumer market in the world
- Search and consolidate new markets for Mexican vegetables.

During this section of the conference, hosted by the director-general manager of AMHPAC, Alfredo Diaz Belmontes, expert speakers presented topics of interest to attendees from Holland, United States, France, Canada and Mexico. Additionally, panel discussions allowed attendees the opportunity to interchange and network with experts.

According to Belmontes, "The future direction for AMHPAC is to position ourselves internationally as a resource providing results resolving industry issues. Our technical and food safety strategies lead and assist industry growers with good business practices to be profitable."

Belmontes adds, "AMHPAC is an organization of excellence and provides best practices for industry. The internal strategies and collaboration with government agencies provide tools to our associates. Competition is always a challenge. However, we are quality growers with a quality product, so competition is always good — since that keeps the quality up for all of us. The one who wins in the end is the consumer. We found that diversification of imports to other areas of the world with varying commodities from Mexico will prove successful. We are interested in meeting the needs of the market, with quality products from Mexico, and meeting the demand of the consumers."

Juan Ariel Reyes, the new president of AMHPAC, said he has many goals. "I am very proud and humbled to be the president of AMHPAC. I feel honored to be in this position and will do my very best for the growth of our industry and our association," said Reyes. "We have associates in 25 of the 31 states of Mexico, and we will continue to strengthen and grow a united organization."

Reyes noted the strength of AMHPAC is in its growers. "The first item on my agenda as president is to travel around Mexico visiting producers to assist them with AMHPAC strengths and uniting growers as well as assist in looking for new markets," Reyes explained. "The strength that I add to this position is that I am the new kid on the block with seven years of hands-on experience in the business. I am a proud grower of Mexican produce, and I thoroughly enjoy working with the crop, the workers and the sales team, which allows me to keep my finger on the pulse of the business and industry."

For more information about AMHPAC, visit amhpac.org.

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A CALL TO ARMS

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



The produce industry is blessed with a cornucopia of national and regional organizations, many of which play an important role in advocating the trade's positions before government. Key issues these trade groups currently wrestle with include things such as the Farm Bill, immigration reform, food safety regulation and much more.

These issues are all important, of course, but they pale in comparison to a new issue that has arisen, and the apparatus of the industry's government relations efforts must pivot quickly to address an urgent threat: that well intentioned produce industry executives in all parts of the supply chain may be charged with a crime and sent to jail despite ever intending to cause any harm.

The recent arrest of Eric and Ryan Jensen of Jensen Farms challenges every trade association in our industry. These groups want nothing to do with defending people whose produce operation wound up killing many people. The organizations don't want to be associated with these people, preferring to have them perceived as "bad apples" and totally distinct from the vast majority of the trade that is cautious to always produce high quality, safe food.

Yet it cannot be emphasized enough that Eric and Ryan Jensen were not arrested for violating any food safety laws. They are not charged with inadequate use of chlorine, or failing to pre-cool cantaloupes, or with illegally purchasing used equipment. The Jensen brothers are charged with "introducing adulterated foods into interstate commerce." That is it. They are not charged with being negligent; they are not alleged to have intended to harm anyone — it is a totally different kind of prosecution than has ever been seen before in our industry.

It is saying that no matter how many audits one has, no matter what the standard of care one followed, no matter how noble were one's intentions — if anything goes wrong, you are not merely responsible, in the sense that one can be sued civilly, but you are criminally liable and can go to jail.

On an elemental level of justice, this is abhorrent. Criminal culpability, as distinct from civil liability, has traditionally required a finding of intent. The Latin phrase *mens rea*, or guilty mind, has long been the prerequisite for a criminal charge. Now, however, we are faced with the idea that well meaning farmers who try to do the right thing can be arrested and jailed for "introducing an adulterant into

interstate commerce." This means that if a bird did its business on the produce and the produce was innocently shipped to a consumer, someone could go to jail. Note that the mere existence of an adulterant is a crime; nobody has to get sick or die.

Beyond justice, this type of charge strikes at the heart of the produce industry. It is in the nature of produce — grown under the influence of winds, rain and soil — that there will be adulterants in the food supply from time to time. There is scarcely an executive in the industry who at one time or another could not be charged with a crime under this standard. Which raises the obvious question: Who is going to be willing to put their very freedom on the line just to produce fresh produce? This law must be reversed.

Some might be tempted to say that the Jensens were uniquely bad people, and that we can rely on prosecutorial discretion to protect the industry. However, when you really read the complaint against the

Jensen brothers, one realizes that they are being charged because it is a high profile case, not for any unique sins. Specifically it is mentioned that: 1) The farm bought used equipment originally intended for potatoes — as if farmers making used equipment work has not gone on since the beginning of agriculture and has not always been widely

praised as a tool in keeping food costs down; 2) that they never used the chlorine sprayer that they could have.

Before the farm had this equipment, it had a giant dunk tank that it filled with chlorinated water. This new equipment included a fresh water sprayer. With a fresh water sprayer, there is no need for chlorine because the FDA has never approved chlorine to remove pathogens from food. Chlorine's purpose is to remove pathogens from water, as in a dunk tank. Since the new system always sprayed clean water, there was no need to use chlorine.

If the FDA wants to make rules or see laws passed that have clear and explicit requirements — say that all cantaloupes must be washed in chlorine or all cantaloupes must be pre-cooled — we have no problem with that, and if someone intentionally or negligently fails to follow the law, fine, throw the book at them.

But there are no laws broken here. Nobody is charged with intent or negligence. This idea that an accidental entry of an adulterant into the food supply is a crime is like a Sword of Damocles hanging over the head of everyone working in this trade. If changing the law is not made, the very top priority of the trade's government relations apparatus, talent and investment will slip away from the industry. If we do not act, and are not successful, our best people will find new opportunities and our future will be constrained.

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This idea that an accidental entry of an adulterant into the food supply is a crime is like a Sword of Damocles hanging over the head of everyone working in this trade.

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In A Rush To Judgment, Taylor Farms Gets Connected To Cyclosporiasis Outbreak Without Sufficient Evidence

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 07.26.2013

It is important that the industry be willing to discuss food safety issues and, certainly, here at the Pundit we have never been shy. From *Botulism & Carrot Juice* to *Cantaloupe and Listeria* to *Buyer-Led Food Safety Initiatives*, we have analyzed and assessed many of the issues. When the FDA issued an import alert on Honduran cantaloupes, we were there, and when a grand Food Safety Leadership Council acted, we wrote about that as well. We focused on foodservice operators and their food safety efforts, and we looked at Irradiation as an approach to deal with food safety issues. When the National Restaurant Association asserted itself on food safety, we evaluated that effort.

We also looked closely at the *Great Pistachio Recall*. Of course, we intensively reviewed the *Salmonella Saint Paul Outbreak*, variously pinned on tomatoes and jalapeños, and the *Great Spinach Crisis of 2006*. We have investigated food safety issues related to sprouts and, of course, looked at traceability and its impact on food safety.

One thing we haven't done is write anything at all about Taylor Farms de Mexico and the cyclosporiasis outbreak. The reason we haven't written about it is that there was this unseemly rush to announce things without satisfactory evidence or even a coherent theory.

The one thing we know about the situation is that the Center for Disease Control has found no evidence of the vast majority of cases having any connection to Taylor Farms de Mexico or to any other Taylor Farms operation. The No. 1 state having cyclosporiasis cases is Texas. It has almost half the known cases, yet to quote the CDC:

"The preliminary analysis of results from an investigation into a cluster of cases that ate at a Texas restaurant does not show a connection to Taylor Farms de Mexico. This investigation is ongoing."

This is not a trivial matter, and it calls into question the findings of Iowa and Nebraska that claim they have identified a connection to Taylor Farms de Mexico going back through certain Darden restaurant chains. These states won't make much information public, so it is hard to assess the accuracy of their claims, but Darden stated it doesn't use Taylor Farms lettuce mix in Texas.

It is possible that it is a problem related to a growing area and that Taylor, the largest of the players, was implicated because its large volumes led to an effective traceback but, in reality, everyone buying from that growing region was affected.

Yet we think this is unlikely because the outbreak is so long-lasting, with illness onsets spreading over two months, this doesn't match likely growing and harvesting patterns.

We look at the geographic dispersion of the problem and its extended time frame, and we doubt that it is fresh produce and certainly not salad mix, at all. That somehow only the tiny percentage of this plant's production that went to Iowa and Nebraska had this problem and all the rest did not seems odd. Since there is no indication the problem was widespread in Taylor's production, we question the accuracy of the assessment in these two states.

Most likely, there is another ingredient, say something in salad dressing that has been the source of the contamination.

We learned from the *Salmonella Saint Paul* outbreak the limits of questioning consumers. Consumer reports are often incomplete, especially on a long incubation period illness such as cyclosporiasis. So consumers may remember they ate tomatoes when they really ate salsa and a component of that salsa is jalapeño. We also learned the limits of the techniques we use to identify foodborne illnesses.

Investigation of food safety outbreaks are a low-tech affair. They give questionnaires to healthy people and to sick people and attempt to identify differences in eating patterns between the groups. So, if a disproportionate number of people say they ate at a particular restaurant or ate a particular food, that restaurant or that food

The one thing we know about the situation is that the Center for Disease Control has found no evidence of the vast majority of cases having any connection to Taylor Farms de Mexico or to any other Taylor Farms operation.

becomes an object of suspicion.

This works well enough for obvious foods — a hamburger, spinach in a spinach salad — but it doesn't work well at all for ingredients. Who knows what items are in the salad dressing they ate at a restaurant two weeks ago?

It doesn't help that the media doesn't generally understand the issues at stake at all. No less a newspaper than *The New York Times* ran a piece titled, "Taylor Farms, Big Food Supplier, Grapples With Frequent Recalls." The piece, written by Stephanie Strom, was shocking because, well, to start with, the basic premises to such a story, that Taylor farms has "frequent recalls" and that such recalls have some connection to the safety of its food, are never established.

Why would this reporter believe this to be so? Well, here is the paragraph in its entirety:

Food safety experts said the number was somewhat higher than they would expect, even given Taylor's size. "While produce companies have by far the most recalls among food companies in general, I'd say one every 12 to 18 months is more the standard," said Gene Grabowski, a consultant who assists companies in dealing with the public and the media over food recalls.

Where does one begin? First of all, the article does not quote ANY



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food safety experts, not one. Mr. Grabowski, though a PR man of great talent, is, most decidedly, not a "food safety expert." He has a bachelor's degree in writing and history, and he has experience as a communications consultant. Second, Grabowski's ballpark assessment of how many recalls are "the standard" for companies is neither supported by data, nor, even if true, meaningful. Suppose we prove that "the standard" is for restaurant companies to have one violation every 12 months. If Joe's single unit diner has two, it is way above the norm, but if McDonald's, with over 32,000 outlets, has 200, it is exemplary.

Well Taylor Farms is the McDonald's of the industry. It is simply nonsensical to discuss the number of recalls as some kind of independent variable. It is more a numerator, and if you don't know the denominator — how many servings shipped — you really can't say anything very useful.

Besides, all recalls are not created equal. Some are due to mistakes that introduced an allergen into a food or are done out of an abundance of caution. Just as you can't judge two surgeons by what percentage of their patients die without knowing the standards by which those surgeons accept cases, so you can't judge two companies without knowing the standards by which they do voluntary recalls.

If one surgeon specializes in the most dangerous surgeries and another rejects any patients with known complications, the statistics could deceive. A death rate of 20 percent for the surgeon willing to try difficult things might mean he is a more talented surgeon than a 2 percent death rate by the surgeon who plays it safe.

So, a high voluntary recall number or percentage might just mean that a company is exemplary in its willingness to accept bad publicity

It is a terrible mistake to leap to conclusions on what individual states happen to say to deduce the cause of national outbreaks.

in order to safeguard consumers.

The temptation to jump to conclusions, to pass aspersions, it seems too much for our society. We need someone to blame and fast. But such knee-jerk reporting isn't helpful; it closes off avenues of investigation that might actually lead to meaningful discovery. Not to mention that it leads to wasteful demands to close plants, to conduct testing at specific facilities, etc., when that is not really justified by the science.

There are lessons here. Our state-by-state process is not really conducive to studying national outbreaks, the focus on traceability is overstated as the slowdown is almost always epidemiology, not traceability, and it is a terrible mistake to leap to conclusions on what individual states happen to say to deduce the cause of national outbreaks.

And, a little skepticism about what one reads in the newspaper is justified as well.

pb



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A CLOSER LOOK AT SNACKING:

Nine Out of Ten School Snacks Brought from Home;

Fresh Fruit Among Most Popular In-School Snacks

Teens & Millennials Most Likely to Consume Just-Bought Snacks

School bells are ringing again and along with the daily bundle of books and school supplies are the all-important snacks. According to snacking research by The NPD Group, students aged 6 to 12 consume 4.1 snack-oriented convenience foods daily in and out of school, and teens 13 to 17 consume 3.8 snacks daily. NPD's SnackTrack®, which tracks all snacking occasions in- and away-from-home every day of the year, reports that 90 percent of school snacks are brought from home.

The most popular school snacks, whether eaten at lunch or at snack time, vary by age group, and often the variation is due to when there is parental influence and when there is not. In the case of 6 to 12 year-olds, an age when parents often choose the foods and beverages their children eat, fresh fruit, fruit cups/applesauce, potato chips, meal kits and yogurt are the top school

a part of the lunch bag carried by children to school, just like snack foods are becoming part of main meals for all of us," says Harry Balzer, NPD chief industry analyst and author of *Eating Patterns in America*. "The bottom line is that we don't want to prepare foods more often. We don't even want to make more sandwiches for our kid's lunch bag, even though sandwiches are still the number one lunch bag item carried by a kid. Instead we are loading the kids' lunch bag with easy-to-prepare snack products to be eaten at lunchtime."

Snacks Purchased By Teens And Millennials Most Often Bought As Instant Consumables

When it comes to snack foods, purchasing these items for immediate consumption represents more than 30 billion eating occasions annually. Teens and young Millennials — those between the ages of 18 and 24 — are the most inclined toward this type of instant gratification.

Between lunch and dinner, followed by lunchtime, are the top occasions during the day when teens are consuming items just purchased. For young

Young Millennials 18-24 Top Instant Consumables

Morning Meal	Luchtime
1. Donuts	1. Fresh Fruit
2. Bagels	2. Potato chips
3. Fresh fruit	3. Tortilla Chips
4. Bars e.g. granola	4. Chocolate candy / candy bars
5. Cookies	5. Cookies

Source: The NPD Group / Snack Track
2 years through March 2013

Millennials, they are most often consuming these items at lunchtime, followed by the morning meal. At two out of three occasions, both teens and young adults also consume a beverage with their snack items.

The Bottom Line

Progress can be made toward a goal of capturing a larger share of this "buy and consume" behavior with an understanding of the consumer dynamics that drive these purchases. For programs at retail, consider recommending a rotation of the types of items stocked near the entrance or check-out counter to align with the consumer need by time of day.

This will align with the consumer need by time of day. For example, display bagels, fruit, and granola bars in the morning, salty snacks and candy in the afternoon. And don't forget the beverage; co-marketing could increase the basket size for these shoppers.

Top 5 Snack-Oriented Foods Consumed At School By

6-12 year olds	13-17 year olds
Fresh Fruit	Gum
Fruit cups / Applesauce	Fresh Fruit
Potato Chips	Potato chips
Meal Kits	Chocolate Candy / Candy Bars
Yogurt	Granola Bars

snacks, according to NPD's SnackTrack.

Teens, who tend to make their own food choices, include gum, fresh fruit, potato chips, chocolate bars/candy bars, and granola bars among their most popular school snacks. For both age groups, sandwiches are still the reigning school lunch entrée and are included in two-thirds of school brown bag lunches.

"Snack foods are increasingly becoming



The Port Washington, NY-based NPD Group provides global information and advisory services to drive better business decisions. Sectors covered include automotive, beauty, entertainment, fashion, food / foodservice, home, office supplies, sports, technology, toys, video games, and wireless. For more information, visit npd.com.

About SnackTrack®

Every day, consumers in the U.S. report their snack food consumption to NPD, resulting in information on over 350,000 snack occasions per year.

Strategic Thinking Needed To Sync With Snacking Trends

BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PRODUCE BUSINESS

The produce industry wrestles with a dilemma that “dare not speak its name” when considering the issue of snacking. As grazing — eating multiple small meals throughout the day — becomes more common, meal occasions become snacking occasions, and the obvious default for the produce industry is to push snacking fruit, typically fruits that are easy to consume, such as apples, pears, bananas, perhaps some easy-peeler citrus, maybe grapes. In some cases, technology and packaging can make these items more appealing; say a cup of individual grapes that fits into a cup holder in a car.

Baby carrots are the vegetable star of the produce snack brigade and, perhaps, celery sticks pick up some business. But, on the whole, the snacking trend is not a friend to many produce items, with the fruits that are unwieldy to eat — say juicy peaches or large melons — and especially not to the salad and cooking vegetables.

Of course, there are different levels of snacking, and melon chunks in a cup can work just fine as part of a sit-down lunch, but cut melons don't translate well into eating in the car.

Yet the fact that so few vegetables work well in the snacking mode is more than problematic for the produce industry. After all, not only do these items account for a lot of traditional volume, but they account for the bulk of the produce industry's claim to be a major contributor to health and wellness.

Of course, sweet snacking fruit has a lot of nutritional attributes — vitamin C, potassium, fiber, etc. Yet sweet snacking fruit is, well, sweet! Now this doesn't mean it is not good for people, especially children. Certainly eating fruit is an excellent nutritional choice, much better than snacking on candy or ice cream. If a person, certainly a child, is highly active, the sugar in sweet fruit can be burned off as useful calories.

If, however, the problem is obesity, not a rise of scurvy due to a shortage of vitamin

C, and if there is evidence of a decline in physical activity whereby lots of sweet calories pose a problem to adults and children, then we must acknowledge that simply pushing snack fruit won't do the job that the produce industry wants to do in terms of produce being a significant advocate in the war against obesity.

In a sense, the produce industry is thus challenged to switch from a general “More Matters” approach, in which boasting all produce consumption is an equal priority, to a new prism, in which the priority is boosting vegetables and especially consumption of bitter vegetables.

Now, the boom in things such as Brussels sprouts and kale certainly shows that people can be motivated to boost consumption of at least certain vegetables. It turns out, though, that a lot of this is driven by foodservice because the key is culinary technique. Cooked well, dressed properly, these items can boom. But they are booming from a small base.

It is often pointed out that more than 50 percent of the food dollar is now spent on food prepared outside the home. This is true, but it overstates the ability of chefs and culinary professionals to move the needle on consumption.

True chefs are now media personalities and can have a powerful impact on consumption if they parley their celebrity to drive healthier cuisine. Their direct impact, though, is smaller than one might think. Firstly, a lot of the star power in chefs comes from the white-tablecloth segment, and that segment isn't even 1 percent of U.S. foodservice sales.

Secondly, although it is true that more food dollars are spent on food away from home than are spent on food at retail, these dollar figures include a lot of payment for the atmospherics associated with dining out and for the preparation of food. Measured in volume of food passing through the channels, retail is the Goliath, accounting for more than 70 percent of sales.

Though we can applaud the idea of selling more produce in the form of snack fruit, we also need to find ways to boost sales of vegetables and non-snack convenient fruits at retail.

So though we can applaud the idea of selling more produce in the form of snack fruit, we also need to find ways to boost sales of vegetables and non-snack convenient fruits at retail.

Of course, one way for retailers to boost sales is to make more prepared foods. By thinking strategically, the industry can create the kinds of products that will sync with trends to more snacking while also contributing to the public good by helping in the fight against obesity.

The produce industry needs to move quickly, though, as many of the trends to use these ingredients in snack-friendly ways are coming through the deli/prepared food department. How do you make a difficult-to-drive-and-eat salad into something more consumer-friendly? Well maybe you turn it into a Mediterranean Wrap.

At retail, this may be competition, but in school cafeterias, the key is to find things kids like and will eat. If it starts with a wrap today, so be it. Today's young charge will grow, and when he does so, maybe he will decide to do his wrap, hold the bread and thus his snack winds up as a salad after all.

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King's Food Markets

How Retailers Can Capitalize On Farmers Market Fervor

Retailers find innovative, profitable ways to work collaboratively, instead of competitively, with farmers markets and in the process deliver a win-win to local growers and consumers.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

It's no secret farmers markets are increasing in popularity, size and scope nationwide. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced a 9.6 percent increase in National Farmers Market Directory listings and identified 7,864 farmers markets operating throughout the U.S.

"As the natural and organic scene grew at retail, customers went to farmers markets to enjoy the experience of supporting the local grower," says Chad Solari, director of produce and floral for Andronico's Community Markets in San Leandro, CA, which operates five stores. "This allowed farmers markets to grow and prosper."

While some view farmers markets as siphoning produce sales, more and more stores are looking to them in collaborative ways. "Farmers markets are competitive because customers who buy produce there may buy less at the store," says Paul Kneeland, vice

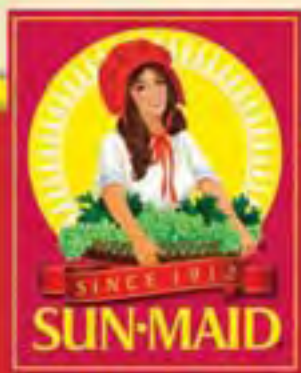
president of produce, floral, seafood and meat for King's Food Markets in Parsippany, NJ, with 25 King's and 6 Balducci's stores. "However, there is opportunity because farmers markets don't provide everything consumers need. Stores will always fill gaps. We can complement each other as much as we compete."

"At the beginning, retailers looked at farmers markets as competition," adds Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service in Monrovia, CA. "But when they started to visit the farmers markets, they saw a different customer and a different orientation. Farmers market prices are generally higher than supermarket prices. Also, they sell produce that's not graded, not sized, and in many cases, very mature. The vision began to change as to how the farmers market experience could actually help the retail business."

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Roundy's partners with the The Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, allowing local farmers to bring their products to its warehouse and directly to stores.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROUNDY'S

Spezzano explains that farmers markets expose products to potential and current customers; for example, heirloom tomatoes or a local grape. "This exposure helps the regular channels of produce add new items because consumers are more apt to try new items in the store," says Spezzano.

"Farmers markets and supermarkets really aren't competitors, and it's great

for them to learn from one another," says Dave Stockdale, executive director of CUESA (Center for Urban Education About Sustainable Agriculture), operating the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market in San Francisco, CA. "Supermarkets can learn how to develop relationships with farmers, do a better job of creating community, and provide fresher product. Farmers markets

can learn how to better present produce on the stands, do visual merchandising, and better market product."

For future success, stores must look to embrace the farmers market culture. "Retailers are hearing more from customers that along with great quality, clean stores and great service, they also want the store to support local farmers," says Lou Malaponti, president & CEO of Farm 2 Store Network, a North Kansas City, MO-based operation that connects local growers with traditional retailers. "In the increasingly competitive marketplace the operators excelling in these types of programs are holding their own and in some cases building their market share."

Create Opportunities For Consumers To Discover Unique Items

Benefits offered by farmers markets provide insight for increasing produce consumption and sales. According to CUESA's Stockdale, farmers markets typically offer a wider variety of unusual produce and provide consumers an opportunity to experience new flavors, thus stimulating their interest. "Consumers sample produce and speak with food producers, enabling

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Andronico's FoodStar Program: Taking Local To Another Level

Newly introduced program not only links local growers but also promotes responsibility by reducing impact of food waste on landfills.

The FoodStar Program was born this year as a way to reduce the impact of food waste on landfills. Andronico's Community Markets, in San Leandro, CA, operating five stores, was an original investor in this start-up and continues to be FoodStar's exclusive retail partner. "Each year in the U.S., 64 billion pounds of food is dumped into our landfills," says Chad Solari, director of produce and floral for Andronico's. "This program allows us to take fresh product from local California growers that might not be quite pretty enough for a traditional retail produce department and offer it to our customers at tremendous value."

Product is specially merchandised in the department. "The direct product is sold in bins by the pound at our stores either inside or outside — depending on local zoning until it is gone," explains Solari. "This gives our regular patrons a great deal on perfectly good fruits and vegetables but additionally opens the

door to customers who, for whatever reason, don't typically buy a lot of fresh produce — a win-win for our community."

Another aspect of the FoodStar program involves in-store "Flash Sales" announced by social and direct media. "These events allow our produce departments to gather mature and near-expiration-date product from our shelves and, again, offer it at an extraordinary value to customers," reports says Solari. "The Flash Sales happen three times a week from 3:00-5:00 pm, and the product is displayed in special bags on a cart in the produce department."

"Both of these methods get perfectly good produce out of landfills and into hungry mouths where it belongs," adds Solari. "Right now, total sales average \$1,500 to \$2,000 a week and are growing. It's a small step in the right direction for a retailer, and our motives resonate with our customers and our community." **pb**

them to learn more about products and be more willing to buy new things. Many farmers markets offer cooking demonstrations or hand out recipes, helping customers

gain confidence in buying and using produce," says Stockdale.

"Farmers markets provide opportunities to discover unique items not offered to

larger retailers due to quantities available," states Raul Gallegos, senior director produce and floral for Bristol Farms in Carson, CA, operating 13 retail stores under

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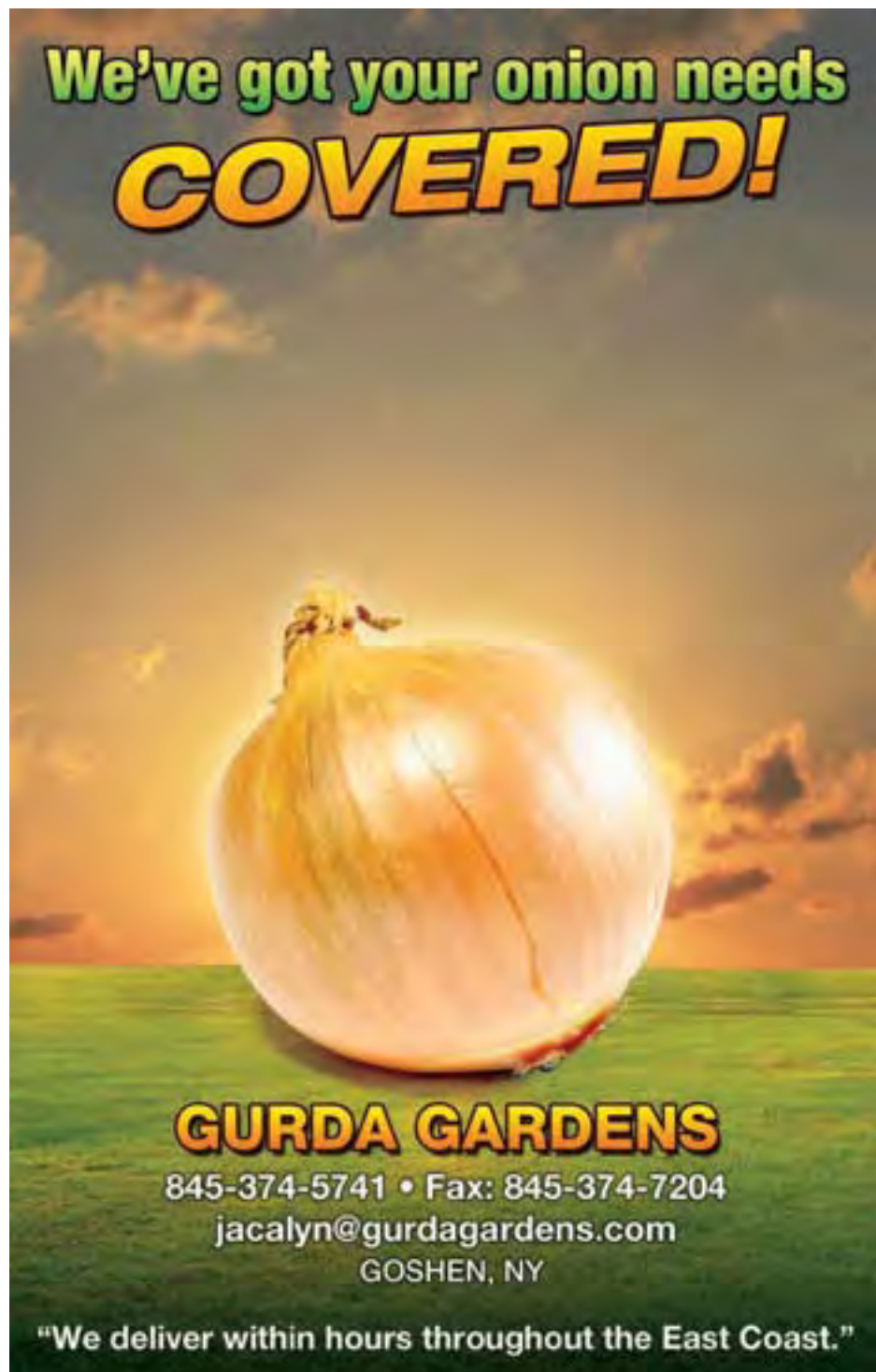
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the Bristol Farms banner and two under the Lazy Acres banner. "The makeup of our stores allows us to fit in well by being in close proximity to many of the growing regions. In many cases, we have customers requesting items they first encounter at local farmers markets."

Consumers relate freshness and local support to farmers markets. "Consumers feel they see better quality than in grocery stores," says Emery VanHook, interim executive director for Market Umbrella, operator

"FARMERS MARKETS AND SUPERMARKETS REALLY aren't competitors, and it's great for them to learn from one another. Supermarkets can learn how to develop relationships with farmers, do a better job of creating community, and provide fresher product. Farmers markets can learn how to better present produce on the stands, do visual merchandising, and better market product."

— Dave Stockdale
Center for Urban Education About Sustainable Agriculture
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of the Crescent City Farmers Market in New Orleans. The company manages three locations weekly and varies from 15 to 30 vendors year-round. "Consumers like supporting local farmers and knowing exactly where their money is going."

Since its founding in 1976, New York City's Greenmarket Co. has had a two-fold mission. "We aim to provide all New Yorkers with access to fresh, regionally grown food while also keeping farmland in production," reports Jeanne Hodesh, communications associate for GrowNYC in New York, NY, operating 54 Greenmarkets across the five boroughs with more than 230 producers in the program.

"Customers tell us the main reasons they shop the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market are the quality and diversity of the produce, the sense of community they experience while at the market, our specific emphasis on sustainability issues, and the beauty of the outdoor setting," says CUESA's Stockdale.

Farmers markets have helped turn consumers back to seasonal shopping. "True farmers markets showcase what's

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local and in season,” says Andronico’s Solari. “As produce has gone global, farmers markets remind us how crops and varieties still come and go with the seasons. Seasonality and local are linchpins to the messaging strategy at our company, especially in produce.”

“Farmers markets have helped spark interest in regionally grown produce,” agrees Steve Jarzombek, vice president of produce at Roundy’s Inc., in Milwaukee, WI, with 161 stores across three states. “They showcase locally grown, and that brings back memories of products sold by farm stands years ago.”

Create Destination-Shopping Experience Versus ‘A Task’

Farmers markets represent more than just a shopping trip. “A farmers market is destination-shopping,” says King’s Kneeland. “It’s usually planned and more an experience versus a task. The challenge for a store is to add that experience yet still convey convenience and variety.”

“Farmers markets create a destination for friends, relatives and neighbors to gather and enjoy an outdoor shopping

experience,” says Jarzombek. “Produce at farmers markets is merchandised and presented in ways appealing to consumer senses and in different, less traditional, but very impactful ways.”

Personal interaction is a crucial part of the farmers market experience. “Consumers love a good story, and at the farmers market, the farmer is there to share it with customers,” asserts Market Umbrella’s VanHook. “That’s a more lasting impression than reading about it on a sign or learning about it online.”

“An important part of the farmers market ambiance is conversation,” says Kneeland. The retail challenge is to create an authentic experience within store constraints.

“It is a real challenge for supermarkets to offer the same experience to customers as a farmers market,” states David Livingston, president of DJL Research in Waukesha, WI. “Many fake it by trying to make the farm connection through pictures or maps.”

“People love to go to farmers markets, so you need to ask how you make people love to go to your store,” emphasizes Kneeland. “Bring the fun, exciting environment into your store.”

“MAKING THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE an adventure will not only allow retailers to offer unique items but could lead customers to spend additional time shopping and hopefully additional purchasing opportunities.”

— Raul Gallegos
Bristol Farms

Creative merchandising and display, combined with POP information, help create a farmers market atmosphere. “The key to calling out a farmers market type section is signage and pictures with an additional flare for merchandising locally grown produce through baskets, bushels, burlap bags, boxes, and orchard bins,” explains Jarzombek. “Additional ways include web-based messaging and highlighting local farms within your produce advertising.”

Continued on page 52



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Sustainability And Food Safety

Are Lynchpins Of New PRO*ACT Retail Initiative

Following a successful foodservice launch, PRO*ACT, North America's leading distributor of fresh produce, is bringing its innovative sustainability and local produce initiative, Greener Fields Together, to the retail sector.

GREENER FIELDS TOGETHER provides customers with a distinct advantage in quality, value, local product sourcing and food safety. The 'seed to fork' program is a collaborative effort among farmers, distributors, foodservice operators and, now, retailers.

PRO*ACT, which sources fresh produce from best-in-class regional and national farmers, implemented the groundbreaking program with two primary goals:

- to execute **sustainable practices** to improve environmental impact,
- to ensure availability of **certified safe produce** to end-users across the country

Since the program's debut in October 2012, the dedicated team at Greener Fields Together, alongside PRO*ACT's network of local and national growers and distributors, has been working together to ensure those goals are met. A mere nine months after the launch of Greener

Fields Together, sustainability improvements were independently verified for eight of PRO*ACT's national farm partners:

- D'Arrigo Bros Co. of California
- Grimmway Farms
- Mission Produce
- Naturipe
- NewStar Fresh Foods
- Rainier Fruit Company
- Sunkist Growers, Inc.
- Taylor Farms California Inc.

These well-known marketers, their growers and the team of Greener Fields Together local growers are committed to the sus-

tainability goals, and they embrace practices such as integrated pest management, energy efficiency, waste diversion strategies and everything in between. They embody the efforts being made toward more sustainable operations and illustrate the commitment partners are making toward ensuring a future for food.

"We are really focused on each touch point in the supply chain," says Kathleen Phillips, PRO*ACT's supply chain sustainability manager. "We work closely with our national farm partners to communicate their sustainability improvements and our local farmers, providing the necessary feedback, training and systems to enhance their sustainability measures and also to assist in

preparation for food safety audits."

"Greener Fields Together allows retailers to be more nimble and able to address consumer demand for not only a wider variety of ethnic and specialty items, but also to support locally grown when their warehouses are only so big and internal resources are limited."

HEALTHY SOLUTION

As recent Technomic research shows, consumers are becoming more health-conscious, but their definition of health is changing. Today's consumers are increasingly driven to local, natural, organ-

ic and sustainable offerings — all of which are strongly tied to their contemporary definitions of health.

As the "catalyst, connector and cultivator" for the program in the grocery retail channel, Kelly Jacob, PRO*ACT's vice president of retail and alternate channels, says the program allows retailers to offer customers a wider variety of fresh produce.

"Today, the consumer or individual shopper is in charge," says Jacob. "Greener Fields Together allows retailers to be more nimble and able to address consumer demand for not only a wider variety of ethnic and specialty items, but also to support locally grown when their warehouses are only so big and internal resources are limited."



Local farm partners in the GREENER FIELDS TOGETHER program are committed to sustainability goals and food safety standards for retailers. Among the local farm partners are (left to right): Hilltop Produce, Troutdale, OR; Scott Farms, Lucama, NC; Mountainland Apples, Santaquin, UT

THE PRO*ACT PLEDGE

From the start, PRO*ACT's national network of 50 distributors and 71 distribution centers pledged to make the program a priority through myriad improvements, including energy-efficient lighting and refrigeration, recyclable totes and pallet wraps, backhauling, and building long-term relationships with local farmers. To complete the circle, foodservice operators — and now retailers — can become part of the groundbreaking initiative.

A benefit is to be able to display the Greener Fields Together emblem — a signal that assures consumers that they are purchasing safe produce from a sustainable supply chain.

In only a year's time, Greener Fields



Ted's Montana Grill's participation in the GREEN FIELDS TOGETHER program allows the chain to purchase local, sustainable and in-season produce for units across the country.

Together has found a permanent home in foodservice. At Ted's Montana Grill, a 44-unit casual dining chain founded by industry veteran George W. McKerrow and media mogul Ted Turner, Greener Fields Together is taking on a life of its own.

McKerrow calls the program "a big initiative for us" and says the program allows the chain to purchase local, sustainable and in-season produce for units across the country. "It enables us to move in different growing cycles and to purchase local, sustainably grown, in-season vegetables through our local PRO*ACT distributor," says McKerrow. "We're also reducing our impact on the roads by not hauling produce all over the country, and we're spending more of our money within our local communities."

PRO*ACT's Phillips says Ted's Montana Grill is a committed partner and, like all other participants, enjoys a program tailor-made for its business. "Ted's has been a real success story," she says. "They are communicating their commitment tableside, educating guests and truly living up to their sustainability commitment."

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Jacob says in the age of social media, retailers are often hard-pressed to stay ahead of a demanding public. "There is no way that grocery chains have the storage capacities to meet all the needs of their customers in different markets. Why bring in some of the unique specialty items if only 20% of stores are selling them?"

To that end, Jacob says the PRO*ACT national network, with its small footprint delivery capabilities and advanced cold chain management through 3.5 million sq. ft. of warehouse space, is the solution for fresh products. "Instead of the big guys having to invest in ten-wheeler trucks, why not take advantage of our network to become more specialized? We are in every major market and can offer retailers the opportunity to drill down to specific demographics."

According to Jacob, for locally grown programs, it also appears consumers are engaged in supporting crops grown in their own states, so it is difficult for retailers to manage all of the different crops, by state, and be able to distribute them from one warehouse. "The PRO*ACT network can offer that point of consolidation, quality assurance, distribution and food safety expectations that not only protect the consumer, but also the entire produce industry," says Jacob. "Once everyone supports programs like Greener Fields Together, our farmers on both national and local levels will be held to higher standards and offer better produce as we all focus on better health and safety."

"Our farmers on both national and local levels will be held to higher standards and offer better produce as we all focus on better health and safety."

For more information, contact Kelly Jacob at 713-398-4000

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Kelly Jacob
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Continued from page 48

"Create a type of farmers market within your store by grouping local items in one spot and using creative displays," suggests Kneeland. "It may encourage people to buy at the store — instead of making an extra stop at the farmers market."

"Making the shopping experience an adventure will not only allow retailers to offer unique items, but it could lead customers to spend additional time shopping and hopefully additional purchasing opportunities," says Bristol Farms' Gallegos.

Focus On Freshness And Flavor As A Major Attraction

Farmers markets are synonymous with freshness and flavor and their proximity to harvest. "All of the 230-plus producers at GrowNYC's Greenmarkets are farming, baking, raising animals or catching the fish they sell within about a 200-mile radius of the city," states Hodesh. "This means the food is fresh. Often it's been harvested just hours before arriving at market and is at its peak of ripeness, rather than being

"A FARMERS MARKET is destination-shopping. It's usually planned and more an experience versus a task. The challenge for a store is to add that experience yet still convey convenience and variety."

— Paul Kneeland
Kings Food Markets

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However, a well managed retail program can put forth similar offerings. "Farmers markets have a tendency to sell more mature produce; thus the flavor peak," says Spezzano. "If a store has control of the buying and supply chain, it can buy riper produce and feature it as 'ripe and ready' to address the flavor benefit."

"Quality and freshness are awash when comparing a farmers market to a good outfit like Andronico's," asserts Solari. "Freshness from a farmers market is a perception that sometimes belies the science of temperature management, food safety protocols, and cold chain responsibility."

Proper handling and distribution ensure quality at retail. "Retailers must have fresh product on display at all times, stressing the importance of rotation and daily ordering," advises Roundy's Jarzombek. "All produce needs to be fresh, not just locally grown. By receiving locally grown produce daily, and shipping it within 24 hours, you are almost guaranteeing the consumer fresh produce."

"Retailers can cut down on the distance between farm and market," says Livingston. "I was in Door County, Wisconsin, last summer. Two supermarkets sold cherries from Washington State, but none from the local cherry orchards. Imagine that!"

Offering optimum flavor is a prime point for focused independents. "Customers love our produce because of the quality and taste," says Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets Inc., in Reading, PA, with 44 stores. "Our quality and flavor message gets across through repeat business and word of mouth."

"Flavor is a big differentiator for me when choosing items to offer," reports Andronico's Solari. "It's one of the attributes lost as

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seasonality loses ground to globalization. We all need to work harder to make it a priority."

Emphasize Seasonality And Proximity When Merchandising

Keeping a high standard on flavor consistency can hinder a chain's inclination to be the first on the market with a new item. "There are many times when we're not the first to come out with clementines or peaches because we don't feel the flavor is there yet," explains Stiles. "We'll wait another two weeks if we need to. It's not about being the first out; it's about having the consistency and quality our customers expect."

"You have to know when to get out of things or when not to get into things," agrees Kneeland. "Sometimes it gets me in trouble with the CEO, but you must make sure it's right before you sell it. It's a balance of knowledge and strategic understanding."

Several stores have furthered the farm connection by specifically defining their local program. Raley's has instituted a "Living Local — Farms & Families within 50 Miles" program. Its website profiles specific farmers it uses for sourcing. "We focus on working

Making The Local Connection

Retailers can play a key role in connecting consumers with the farmers who grow their food.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

As interest in local increases, stores are poised with opportunity to connect customers to local growers. "Local is a trend ingrained in consumers now," says Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service in Monrovia, CA. "The local season may vary depending where you are, but stores should be using and promoting local growers as much as possible."

"Consumers are concerned with supporting farmers within their communities," says Steve Jarzombek, vice president of produce at Roundy's Inc. in Milwaukee,

WI, with 161 stores. "We've received positive feedback on our efforts to partner with our local farmers and the newly established Wisconsin Food Hub [which provides a distribution point for local farmers to deliver produce to retailers]. Consumers tell us the farmers in their communities are very important to them."

Retailers can leverage the grower connection by bringing growers to them. "Stores can conduct 'Meet the Grower' events where growers are at specific stores on certain days," suggests Lou Malaponti, president & CEO of Farm 2 Store Network, a North Kansas City, MO-based operation that connects local growers with traditional retailers. "The retailer notifies its customer base through weekly circulars, bag stuffers or social media. Many customers love this and will make a special trip to the store."

Another way to create a personal connection is through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. "Few programs out there connect the customer to the retailer better," says Malaponti. "The person in charge of this

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program at store level knows the customer members by name, and the customers' loyalty to the retailer is second to none. By signing up to the retailer's CSA program, customers can generally save up to 25 percent on their fresh local produce. This program, once implemented, takes the average basket size and the average produce transaction through the roof. Farm 2 Store Network helps retailers create these programs."

Stores not yet ready for such steps can start by showcasing local products and ensuring signage. "Supermarkets should carry local farm products and highlight these with signs," says Jarzombek. "Signage should state which farms the products are from and have pictures posted next to the products throughout the department."

David Livingston, president of DJL Research in Waukesha, WI, says, "Use pictures and a map of where the farm is. The key is to feature products only grown in the region, such as Hatch Peppers in New Mexico or Door County Wisconsin cherries."

"Since we have stores across several

states, we use a variety of farmers close to our various stores to ensure the product really is grown in our customers' immediate area," reports says Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets Inc., in Reading, PA, with 44 stores. "We use big banner signs with pictures of our local farmers in our store windows and scaled down pictures throughout the department."

Andronico's Community Markets in San Leandro, CA, operating five stores, features local grower information in-store, on order guides and within multiple social and direct media platforms. Chad Solari, director of produce and floral for Andronico's advises, "Educate subtly, building on the trust you've already earned from your loyal patrons and provide just enough interesting material to curious new shoppers."

Redner's presents its local farmers on its webpage and Facebook. "Growers give two-minute presentations of what they're growing, how they do it and what varieties they grow," explains Stiles. "Farmers are so proud of their products and really know their stuff. Our customers love the details they talk about."

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with farmers within 50 miles of each of our stores,” says Nicole Townsend, spokeswoman for Raley’s in West Sacramento, CA, with 128 stores under the Raley’s, Bel Air, Nob Hill Foods and Food Source banners. “We often have signage in our stores telling the stories of these local farmers.”

Kings is differentiating itself with a “Local Fresh 24/7 Program.” Kneeland explains, “This [program] gets product from the field to the store within 24 hours. We run it for 12 weeks in New Jersey and about 11 weeks in

Connecticut. Next year we’re hoping to expand it to our Maryland stores.”

The perception at a farmers market is that the produce was just picked that day. “This same concept is what we’re trying to accomplish with the 24/7 program,” adds Kneeland. “We can say it actually did come out of the farm less than 24 hours ago.”

Make A Connection

Talking to farmers is one of the most highly touted aspects of a farmers market.

“FRESHNESS FROM A FARMERS MARKET is a perception that sometimes belies the science of temperature management, food safety protocols, and cold chain responsibility.”

— Chad Solari
Andronico’s Community Markets

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“Consumers shop farmers markets for the personal connection with growers,” says Mark Psilos, associate director of the Green City Market in Chicago, IL, with an average of 60 vendors. “Consumers appreciate the value of knowing exactly where products are coming from and how they’re being produced.”

Customers enjoy the opportunity to sample and learn about the food as well as what to do with it. “The relationships they develop create shopping loyalty and make them feel they’re doing more than just buying groceries,” says CUESA’s Stockdale.

Consumers seek out many types of information in a personal way. “If you see a gnarly looking root vegetable you’ve never encountered before, you can ask the farmer what it is and how to prepare it,” says Hodesh. “If you notice there are seven varieties of apples to choose from, and don’t know which you’d like, you can ask the farmer to explain the differences and will likely get a sample on the spot.”

“The consumer gets caught up with meeting the grower and hearing the grower stories,” concurs Spezzano Consulting’s Spezzano. “This connection is something a lot of good marketers in regular channels have run with.”

A retail operation can incorporate some type of grower connection [see *Making The Local Connection* on pg 54]. “Many retailers now schedule grower visits so customers have direct interaction,” reports Gallegos of Bristol Farms. “We do this on a regular basis, and many customers highly value it.”

Signage and in-store tools communicate with customers. “People want to connect, so be sure to offer them the opportunity,” advises Kneeland. “Start with signage and a good marketing program. Develop a good in-store sampling person who can prepare



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Limited-time offers, signage, sampling and meet-the-farmers events are just some of the ways retailers offer the farmers market experience.

products to let people try. Educate people on when the peak of the season is. People want information, so provide it and make it simple."

Another unique benefit of farmers markets is their ability to create community. "Our outdoor markets transform urban space into neighborhood centers of sustainability," says Hodesh. "They become places where neighbors talk with one another, get

to know the farmers who grow their food, and have genuine exchanges at this intersection of rural and urban life."

Farmers markets involve consumers in a myriad of ways. "We offer cooking demonstrations, cherry pit spitting contests, book signings and other events," reports Hodesh. "Customers can also drop off used textiles, rechargeable batteries, old cell phones and food scraps for recycling and compost."

"OUR FARMERS GROW specialty items like heirloom tomatoes, fairytale eggplants and donut peaches to sell directly to consumers, thus increasing the public's interest and excitement around cooking, eating and purchasing fresh foods."

— Jeanne Hodesh
GrowNYC

Innovative stores can look to develop similar community gathering opportunities. "Retailers can create a sense of community possibly by creating more spaces to relax or gather and by having more staff to talk with customers about food choices," advises Stockdale.

"Some stores put up tents in peak season and invite growers to showcase their product," reports Spezzano.

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Farmers Market Mentality: Give Consumers Treasure-Hunting Experience

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Doing homework on uniqueness of farmers market offerings and establishing shrink-reducing salesmanship techniques are keys to connecting with consumers.

Farmers markets present a unique opportunity for treasure hunting products like cardoons, ramps or scapes — local items with short shelf life and very small volume. “Hard-to-find items get shoppers excited about food,” says Emery VanHook, interim executive director for Market Umbrella, operator of the Crescent City Farmers Market in New Orleans. “It’s very rewarding for the farmer to bring something like that to market.”

“Items such as ramps, wild strawberries, morels, and unique heirloom vegetable varieties are very popular and attract many customers due to their rarity and limited availability at more traditional retail outlets,” says Mark Psilos, associate director of the Green City Market in Chicago, IL.

“We have customers who will do a preliminary circle of the market then go back and buy after they’ve seen what’s in the market,” says Dave Stockdale, executive director of CUESA (Center for Urban Education About Sustainable Agriculture), operating the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market in San Francisco, CA. “Some sellers keep things under the table for their special customers — Bahri dates is a great example.”

Greenmarket farmers sell varieties of



fruits and vegetables not commonly offered. According to Jeanne Hodesh, communications associate for GrowNYC in New York, NY, “Our farmers grow specialty items like heirloom tomatoes, fairytale eggplants, and donut peaches to sell directly to consumers, thus increasing the public’s interest and excitement around cooking, eating and purchasing fresh foods.”

“Specialty items also attract and inspire our city’s many well-known chefs who shop at Greenmarket for stand-out ingredients to distinguish their menus,” asserts Hodesh. “These items often form the cornerstone in farmer-chef relationships, because the pleasure in growing such an item is matched by the chef’s enthusiasm when he

finds it in the market. Wild violets, spigarello broccoli and milkweed florets are just some of the specialty items to keep one’s eyes peeled for.”

Finding Treasures In The Produce Department

Though more limited in scope, supermarkets still can cater to treasure-hunting customers. “The customer is offering you a chance to grab their attention and sell them something,” says Chad Solari, director of produce and floral for Andronico’s Community Markets in San Leandro, CA. “Retailers need to have the guts to stock and promote non-traditional items and to work hard to create extraordinary values on

Partnering with local growers is increasingly popular. “We have a commitment to bring local produce into our stores,” says Raley’s Townsend. “Many of the local farmers who sell at farmers markets also have product in our stores.”

Collaborate With Local Farmers

Farm-side organizations and retailers are collaborating in beneficial ways. A year ago, GrowNYC founded Greenmarket Co., a mission-driven wholesale distribution service. “It works with mid-size growers in our region who have the volume to sell to customers like institutional buyers and

retail food stores,” explains Hodesh. “The bottom line is providing a fair price to the local farmer at an affordable cost to the consumer.”

The Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative (WFHC) was established this past year to bring together smaller farms into one pick up area so a retailer can consolidate all the produce from different farms daily. “At Roundy’s, we partnered with the WFHC, allowing many local farmers to bring their products to our warehouse, and, in some cases, directly to our stores,” says Roundy’s Jarzombek. Each day’s harvest is picked up and delivered fresh to Roundy’s.

“This helps the local farmers sell what has been harvested daily and gives the consumer produce picked fresh within 24 hours,” says Jarzombek. “It’s the best of all worlds for the consumer and the retailer. We merchandise the all farmers’ products with their names and pictures of their farms within unique sections of produce.”

Farm 2 Store Network offers programs to connect growers to retailers. “We work with farmers that grow within about a 300-mile radius of the retailer’s operational area,” explains Malaponti. “We help the growers move toward GAP certification. We work with the retailer’s current grower roster. At the



them. That is the treasure at retail."

Retailers can add an element of a treasure hunt each week by featuring something special. "Stores can offer a greater diversity of fresh produce, especially local in-season items, and highlight where those products came from," suggests CUESA's Stockdale. "Offering cooking demos, recipes and fresh product sampling will stimulate interest in trying unfamiliar produce."

Andronico's customers have come to expect the unexpected. "Showcasing and promoting low volume, local, and ultra-seasonal items are what set us apart from the crowd," says Solari. "Other retailers who have 'shrink-on-the-brain' can't get

past the initial honeymoon phase with its higher shrink potential and are left with a safe but woefully uninteresting produce department."

People shop Kings' stores to find unique things. "Our associates are trained to guide people to these items and help educate them. For example, we just started a tree ripened mango program and everybody's buzzing about it," says Kneeland.

As for the question of shrink on unique items, Kneeland says Kings sells enough of these items to sustain themselves. "Part of our success has to do with training associates and working together with partners like Melissa's / World Variety Produce, Inc. [based in Los Angeles, CA]," he says. "It's

not just putting something out and hoping it sells. It's making the effort to sell it. To sell a Buddha Hand, for example, you have to display it correctly, know how to handle it and think out of the box."

"Unique locally grown vegetables like purple beets, kale, basil, arugula, or heirloom tomatoes draw a lot of interest and appeal to many customers," says Steve Jarzombek, vice president of produce at Roundy's Inc., in Milwaukee, WI. "Supermarkets can offer mixed packs or smaller pack sizes on a lot of these unique items and get them daily from their warehouse."

Redner's Markets Inc., in Reading, PA, often carries anything local growers have available, even if it's just a short window. According to Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral, "Our local strawberries are only a two-to-three-week window. But, our customers really want them. We price them higher than the California berries because they are local and do have great flavor. Our customers get excited when they see them."

Successful retail operators are the ones who spend time understanding farmers markets and trying to emulate their strengths. "Showcase some exciting items they have at your local farmers market," suggests Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service in Monrovia, CA. "Talk to the guy at the farmers market who has these items, and find out how much is selling. A good buyer can get just about anything — and possibly buying directly from the same grower at the farmers market. Now you've linked your store to the farmers market and offered something to customers they haven't seen. It enhances your variety image and enhances your image of being involved with the local community." **pb**

retailer's request, we source new growers and new items they would like to offer."

The company also has several sales driven programs available for retailers, such as Farmers Market Weekends. "These programs create animation and theatre on the front sidewalk," says Malaponti. "We also offer a 10-week peak-of-the-season Pick 5 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, Meet the Growers events and also a Fall Harvest promotion."

"Retailers are profiting from such programs," says Malaponti. "One Midwest retailer on this program has seen summertime produce sales increased from about

12 to 13 percent upwards of 16 to 18 percent of total store sales," reports Malaponti. "All while not sacrificing any additional margin deterioration."

Some operators partner with growers for community events. "We participate in the Reading Family Expo, a big public event in Reading, PA, with several of our local farmers," says Redner's Stiles. "Local growers are part of our booth and hand out product samples to the families who attend."

"We work with independent supermarkets that purchase directly from farmers at our market," reports Psilos of Chicago's Green City Market. "Supermarkets can use

their existing infrastructure like parking lots to host farmers markets."

Local organizations supporting local farms represent another opportunity. "In many cases, a store can make a donation to one of these organizations," says Spezzano. "Customers walking into a local farmers market could see a sign outside saying 'Sponsored by XYZ Supermarket.' Stores can also buy local product and then put a sign in the store about the grower to advertise the local farmers market. These avenues help customers make a connection between the store and the farmers market." **pb**



ADVERTISEMENT

GROWER ALLIANCE OFFERS QUALITY AND RELIABILITY FOR ALL SEASONS

For seven strong years, Grower Alliance has been serving customers by providing quality, reliable products throughout various seasons. The foundation of Grower Alliance's success is built on its partnerships with a variety of outstanding Mexican fruit and vegetable growers. This allows the company to import and distribute a wide range of top-notch products for retailers, foodservice, wholesalers, distributors, and brokers in the U.S. and Canada.

The group was formed by Jorge Quintero (sales), Luis Caballero (head of Mexican operations), and two growers in Mexico. "Our customers have given us positive feedback over the years," reports Quintero. "They like the way we do business, and are comfortable when they purchase product from us. We have heard that we do a great job in giving our customers exactly what they need."

AMPLE AVAILABILITY OF PRODUCTS

Grower Alliance handles a wide array of products during the year. Grower Alliance has sought out perfect deals to develop year-round offerings in key items. Currently, the company ships tomatoes and greenhouse bell peppers year-round from Nogales and McAllen.

Springtime offers a wealth of items available late March through the Fourth of July. Grower Alliance's spring crops provide a steady supply of core items including watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, green bell peppers, cucumbers and hot peppers.

Moving from Spring to Summer is easy with Grower Alliance. An innovative partnership with a greenhouse grower in Michoacán allows the company to offer a mixture of greenhouse-grown beef-

steak tomatoes, Roma tomatoes and bell peppers. These items are available through McAllen during the summer.

Fall brings back many of the Springtime favorites as well as some new additions. During this early-Fall shipping period, Grower Alliance offers a broad line including watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, and hot peppers. These items are available starting late September through Nogales.

The winter season starts in mid-November, shipping primarily through Nogales. Winter items include watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, green beans, euro cucumbers, eggplant, and green bell peppers.

"We have focused on having a constant supply through the seasons on our core items to be able to extend our commitment with our customers to season-long contracts," reports Quintero. "This has also allowed us to develop our relationships with retail stores and to get our products to the consumers quicker."

EXPANDING THE BUSINESS

To better serve customers, Grower Alliance has added various services. With the acquisition of its Nogales building in July of 2011, it began offering in-and-out services to other companies as well as rent office space to them. The company also offers consolidation services for companies outside of Nogales that want to load in one location as opposed to picking up in different warehouses.

Three years ago, Grower Alliance began shipping through McAllen, TX to better serve customers and keep a fluid working relationship with them. "Utiliz-

ing McAllen as a shipping point has allowed us to continue servicing our customers through both the McAllen and Nogales seasons," says Quintero.

The company continues to look for opportunities to expand and serve its customers and growers. "We are flexible and open to creating unique packs specified by customers," says Quintero. "We're doing more RPC packs and other specialty packs for retail or wholesale. Our relationships with customers continue to grow and allow us to work together to develop special options"

UNSURPASSED DEDICATION

Grower Alliance is dedicated to quality and food safety standards. Since the inception of the company, it has made every effort to stay on top of food safety programs and ensure delivery of a product virtually free of any food safety issues. The company employs two people in Mexico who work with all of its growers to ensure food safety is a priority in all areas. Both employees continuously perform audits at all growers' packing sheds and make certain they are up to par with food safety standards. Grower Alliance has all growers both GAP and GMP certified, and all growers fields' have been certified for pesticide residue with either Primus Labs or Scientific Certification Systems.

Grower Alliance currently uses a traceability program through its produce software, Optima Produce. Each of its growing areas and in turn each of its growers has a specific code for identification. Each field and even each lot also has its own code. A sticker with a code is placed on each box to identify the following information at box-level: area, grower, field, lot, date harvested, date packed. The software can provide a report showing when the product was



received at warehouse and when it was shipped out to the customer. The Grower Alliance website contains a page where customers can enter the code from the box and receive the pertinent information. In 2012-13, the company used HarvestMark to provide item-level traceability for watermelons, mini-

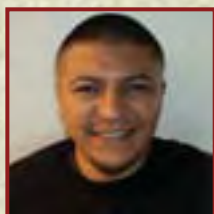
watermelons, and honeydews.

"I believe our honesty and our desire and ability to work with our customers makes us successful," states Quintero. "We are honest and up front and it helps avoid many problems down the line. The owners of the company are close-knit and have a clear

idea as a whole where we want our company to go. We have also extended our reach into our communities, where we play a part in assisting any non-profit organizations we encounter. We believe in being part of the solution, not being part of the problem!"

KEY PEOPLE TO KNOW

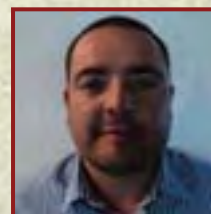
Following are the key people involved with Grower Alliance who can be an asset to your business:



Jorge Quintero, Jr.
Sales, Managing Member



Jorge Quintero, Sr.
Sales Manager, Managing Member



Luis Caballero
Mexican Operations, Managing Member
(contracting growers, planning production schedule, grower relations)



Jaime Martinez
Head Accountant & Grower Relations



Frank Hernandez II
Sales



Luis Alcantara
Sales Assistant



Maritza Guevara
Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable



Armando Robles
Warehouse Foreman



Cesar Yanez
Dispatcher/Quality Control

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Sprouts Farmers Market Bests Wal-Mart Produce Pricing In Tulsa

The low-price retailer struggles to uphold its position as leader. **BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**



Experts in retail point out that Wal-Mart's positioning is now problematic. The problem? The growth of deep discount concepts such as Aldi and Save-A-Lot seems to pose the danger of positioning Wal-Mart not as a low-price leader but, instead, as somewhere in the middle. Trapped between those offering better assortment and more services and those offering better prices, the middle is usually a rough place to be.

Yet despite this looming issue, the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report has been remarkably consistent: When it comes to competing with conventional supermarkets, Wal-Mart rarely gets beat. In fact, in 25 separate studies spanning more than a decade, only once did a large scale mainstream supermarket concept beat the prices at the Wal-Mart Supercenter — a singular Kroger in Savannah, GA.

Now as the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report rolls into Tulsa, OK, we find that Wal-Mart's position remains strong, but we also see that Wal-Mart's position is now under siege, everywhere.

Wal-Mart did well in Tulsa. It beat supercenter rival Target, as Super Target's prices turned out to be 12.9 percent over Wal-Mart's. As for Winn-Dixie, it came out with prices 17.4 percent over Wal-Mart. The Warehouse Market wasn't selling wholesale, as its prices ran out as 8.8 percent over Wal-Mart. Reasor's was just blown out of the water, with prices a full 43.6 percent over Wal-Mart.

Yet Wal-Mart did not win in Tulsa. The low price leader was not

Wal-Mart but Sprouts Farmers Market, edging Wal-Mart out of first place with prices 1.9 percent under Wal-Mart.

Now there are always complications. Reasor's, for example, offers a frequent shopper program that earns customers discounts on gasoline that others don't offer. This particular Sprouts Market has been open less than six months, so some of its pricing may be influenced by its "just-opened" status.

Still, there is this disturbing fact for the executives in Bentonville: for the first eight years of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Study, the Wal-Mart Supercenter won 17 out of 20 editions of the study — and another edition was won by a Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, which was running some specials. So Wal-Mart's low-priced leadership won in 18 out of 20 editions of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report.

Yet in the last five editions of the study, in New Jersey; Dallas, TX; Savannah, GA; Lake Worth, FL, and Tulsa, OK, Wal-Mart has never once won the low-priced banner.

Sprouts, the Tulsa champion, also beat Wal-Mart in Dallas, making it two for two in this David and Goliath battle.

Now, of course, there is much we don't know. The PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report only covers fresh produce, so it is possible that Wal-Mart's compromised position on produce pricing is a result of strategy shifts among the players; maybe Wal-Mart is more

focused on quality — thus all its TV commercials trying to show how great its produce is. Or maybe other retailers see produce as a rare place in the store where they can be price-competitive and focus on that.

There may be some truth to the latter. It is difficult for a small player to out-buy Wal-Mart on consumer packaged goods. Heinz Tomato Ketchup and Hellmann's Real Mayonnaise, Pampers diapers and Campbell's soup are manufactured products, and smaller players are going to pay the same or more than what Wal-Mart pays.

In procuring produce, though, size is not necessarily an advantage. Retailers in a position to buy that extra load that a shipper has on the floor, or flexible enough to help a wholesaler out when he is hung, often can buy product for less than the price a behemoth like Wal-Mart has to pay.

Specifications and merchandising flexibility play a role as well. If a retailer is able to find tasty melons or peaches, but ones that are a different size or variety than it usually specifies and it is flexible enough to accept such product, it can offer consumers a great value, increase its own margins, and help out a shipper or wholesaler — all while creaming Wal-Mart on price.

Food safety and traceability issues play into the picture as well. Every step Wal-Mart might take, say requiring Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) participation by its vendors or demanding only Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) compliant product, serves to constrain its supply chain. This offers a double whammy: Firstly, it means when looking at the supply/demand situation for its own produce purchases, Wal-Mart, by constraining its supply chain *de facto*, reduces the available supply from which it can purchase. This move raises costs.

Paradoxically, however, Wal-Mart's decision to not purchase produce that doesn't comply with its standards means that Wal-Mart, the largest buyer in the world, is no longer increasing demand for the non-compliant product. This creates a secondary produce market, in which Wal-Mart is not a factor. Its absence has the effect of reducing demand for the product in this secondary market. Less demand means lower prices, so Wal-Mart's actions not only raise its costs, but actually lower the costs that smaller competitors, without these standards, wind up paying for produce.

One saw this dynamic strongly at work in last year's visit of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report to Lake Worth, FL, which

How They Stack Up Against Wal-Mart Supercenter

Region	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart
Connecticut-5/02	Super Stop & Shop . . . . .	.23%	Shaws . . . . .	.34%	Big Y . . . . .	.36%
Salt Lake City-10/02	Harmon's . . . . .	.2%	Smith's . . . . .	.6%	Albertson's . . . . .	.12%
South Florida-2/03	Super Target . . . . .	.22%	Publix . . . . .	.31%	Winn-Dixie . . . . .	.52%
Dallas, Texas-10/03	Albertsons Neighborhood Market — 1.2%	.23% .27%	Brookshires Tom Thumb . . . . .	.7% .27%	Kroger . . . . .	.19%
Portland, OR-3/04	Albertsons Safeway . . . . .	.30% .37%	Fred Meyer . . . . .	.22%	Haggen . . . . .	.27%
Phoenix, AZ-8/04	Albertsons Safeway . . . . .	.22% .17%	Bashas' . . . . .	.25%	Fry's . . . . .	.15%
Palm Springs-10/04	Albertsons Vons . . . . .	.19% .20%	Jensen's . . . . .	.60%	Ralphs . . . . .	.16%
Detroit, MI-1/05	A&P Food Basic . . . — 17% Meijer . . . . .	.3% .3%	Farmer Jack . . . . .	.24%	Kroger . . . . .	.28%
St. Louis, MO-5/05	Dierbergs . . . . .	.22%	Schnucks . . . . .	.14%		
Houston, TX-9/05	HEB . . . . .	.15%	Kroger . . . . .	.30%	Fiesta Mart . . — 0.3%	
Atlanta, GA-11/05	Harry's Publix . . . . .	.18% .13%	Ingles Target . . . . .	.16% .3%	Kroger . . . . .	.25%
Denver, CO-5/06	Albertsons . . . . .	.16%	King Sooper . . . . .	.21%	Safeway . . . . .	.25%
Portland, OR-10/06	Albertsons Safeway . . . . .	.32% .30%	Fred Meyer . . . . .	.21%	QFC . . . . .	.54%
Toronto Canada-7/07	A&P Sobeys . . . . .	.35% .45%	Brunos . . . . .	.28%	Loblaws . . . . .	.13%
Kansas City, KS-10/07	Dillions Price Chopper . . . . .	.20% .13%	Hen House . . . . .	.15%	Hy Vee . . . . .	.18%
Los Angeles-4/08	Fresh & Easy Vons . . . . .	.15% .14%	Stater Bros . . . . .	.8%	Ralphs . . . . .	.25%
Orlando, FL-10/08	Publix Winn Dixie . . . . .	.32% .28%	Super Target . . . . .	.22%	Whole Foods . . . . .	.38%
Phoenix, AZ 4/09	Wal-Mart Markewtside Fresh & Easy . . . . .	.23% .32%	Wal-Mart Neighborhood Fry's . . . . .	.7% .27%	Bahas Safeway . . . . .	.30% .37%
Raleigh, NC 9/09	Food Lion Kroger . . . . .	.24% .21%	Fresh Market Super Target . . . . .	.31% .11%	Harris Teeter . . . . .	.35%
Philadelphia 4/10	Acme Super Fresh . . . . .	.17% .21%	Genuardi's Wegmans . . . . .	.22% .5%	Giant . . . . .	.26%
New Jersey 10/10	FoodBasics — 1%		Pathmark . . . . .	.15%	ShopRite . . . . .	.8%
Dallas 10/11	Albertson's Sprouts — 7%	.25% .25%	Central Market Super Target . . . . .	.19% .10%	Kroger Tom Thumb . . . . .	.21% .51%
Savannah 6/12	Food Lion Piggly Wiggly . . . . .	.7% .27%	Fresh Market Publix . . . . .	.51% .22%	Kroger — 2%	
Lake Worth, FL 11/12	El Bodegon — 9.5% Sedano's . . . . .	.647% .647%	Presidente — 18.4% Winn-Dixie . . . . .	.174% .174%	Publix . . . . .	.29%
Tulsa, OK 10/13	Reasor's Warehouse Market . . . . .	.436% .88%	Sprouts — 1.9% Winn-Dixie . . . . .	.174% .174%	Super Target . . . . .	.12.9%

In Search of Flavor One Leaf At A Time

Known around the world for his bromeliads and orchids, grower Kerry Herndon re-routes his journey seizing culinary opportunities to share flavor with all sizes of American kitchens. PRODUCE BUSINESS met with Herndon of Homestead, FL to discuss his culinary explorations and to learn about his new venture. BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN

After 42 years as a grower, why have you added herbs and microgreens to your ornamental business?

KH: Our society and economy is in transition from a material (get stuff) to an experiential base. We all have enough stuff... now we want to live well, which very much includes a better daily culinary experience. Fresh herbs dramatically improve anything we cook. I have for years maintained a kitchen garden for fresh herbs and use them almost daily. Fresh, local, and healthy are permanent trends that I am delighted to be a part of.

What is the name of your new company and what industry segments are your customers?

KH: We chose to keep the name Kerry's because of the familiarity of the name within the supermarket industry's produce and floral arena. I have been around for a long time. Lots of people know the name. The new company is called **Kerry's Kitchen Gardens**, and that also is our brand, which will be marketed to foodservice and retail customers. So we will have packaging for foodservice distribution as well as packaging for retail supermarkets, mass markets and club stores.

Tell us about the production site. Where are you growing the herbs and microgreens?

KH: We have a Central Florida location in Apopka, contiguous to the new 414 expressway. This is about one million square feet of glass greenhouses in connected one acre blocks. The entire facility has asphalt floors and aluminum rolling benches. We can achieve a sanitary standard that is far above the highest existing industry standard. The facility already has huge coolers that we are modifying to become packing and storage areas with multiple temperature zones. Automatic backup generators ensure electrical power. The integrity of the cold chain will always be maintained. Some new seeding equipment had to be purchased and is in place.

We had to design and fabricate automated harvesting equipment for the microgreens on site. Customizing automation is something we are used to doing.

What is production time for the microgreens?

KH: There are many different types of microgreens and the crop times vary from seven to 14 days. A true microgreen is the first two cotyledon leaves (seed leaves), *plus* the first two *true leaves*. I have seen at retail a lot of seed leaves sold as "microgreens" – but they are far from it. They are more like sprouts with very little flavor. It is the *true leaves* that have the great boost in vitamins and flavor. The intense flavor is what makes microgreens wonderful.

Does growing in such a controlled environment enable your company to apply for Organic certification?

KH: Food safety is one of the great issues of our time. We must operate at a much higher level of control than at any time in the history of our industry. Our sealed facilities allow us to grow to organic certification standards. At the same time, our food safety levels are going to be extreme. I consider this a great competitive advantage.





What additional advantages will the Central Florida production location offer?

KH: The facility was retrofitted some years ago to grow very high-value bedding plant plugs. No expense was spared to optimize the growing environment. This allows us to be a consistent supplier year round. And our proximity to I-75 and I-95 gives us a straight shot to the East Coast markets as well as the Midwest.

Tell us more about the East Coast and Midwest 'local' advantages.

KH: 'Local' is a big selling point now in retail and foodservice, and many studies show that 'local' is preferred over organic among consumers. We have the ability to market our product as both local and organic, plus we think we have an advantage over many other organic growers because we are in a controlled environment. For many customers, delivery on the same day as harvest is achievable. Consider our geographic location to ports for foodservice — cruise ships departing from Port Canaveral on the East Coast are only 70 miles from Apopka, from the West Coast, the port is only 94 miles away, and from Miami, the port is only 3.5 hours by truck. For special orders, the Orlando International Airport is only 30 miles away.

What experiences in the horticulture industry have you had that are now helping guide you in this new venture into edibles?

KH: For the most part, plants are plants. This is not such a big step. I had the privilege many years ago, as the floral industry representative, to serve on the Produce Marketing Association Board of Directors. I still consider this as one of the greatest experiences in my life. Working with large retailers is where I have spent most of my life. They are people I like very much, and I have made many strong friendships in this industry through the decades.

Foodservice is relatively new to me, but we are already serving some large accounts in Florida and, in many ways, we are learning that the foodservice industry is a natural fit for our high-end products

and corporate culture. It seems they need the same things as large retailers — safe, consistent, high quality product without interruptions in supply. We will deliver that.

People close to you say you are a fabulous cook. Do you consider yourself a foodie and do you anticipate invitations from chefs to see what's happening in restaurant kitchens?

KH: I love to cook. I read *Cooks Illustrated* with great pleasure, and I consider myself a serious amateur. The rules in cooking are simple, great ingredients make great tasting food. Absolutely fresh herbs are the best and simplest way to improve the flavor of almost anything. I love open kitchens so that I can enjoy the preparation process. Few of us appreciate how hard the work is in a good kitchen. I so much look forward to sharing these great new tastes with professional chefs.

In doing the trial growing of many different microgreens, I am stunned at the great taste profiles that are just not available to the buying public. Radish greens taste just like radishes without the radish. What a great addition to a salad or savory dish! Mustard greens are another world of different flavors. It goes on and on. This is a process of culinary exploration that is pure pleasure for me. It is nearly endless.

With the change from orchids to edibles, how has your travel schedule changed?

KH: Now my energy is spent finding flavor and discovering valid seed sources from flavor capitals around the world. For example, I plan to travel to Thailand again to source some flavors that have intrigued me for years. The countries I visit most often are China and Thailand. I expect to find great seed suppliers and great flavors to bring back home. I will do the same in China. There are so many amazing food choices in the world that we just never see or taste. I hope to change some of this.

Basil seems to be your new passion. Could you explain some of basil's characteristics?

KH: Fresh basil is almost half of the fresh-cut herb market. There is a reason. Fresh basil can be used in so many ways. I can never get too much tomato, mozzarella, and basil salad. Try this with micro basil and it is a new experience. Micro basil is very tender, yet has intense flavor. Now add lemon basil or cinnamon basil for a different experience. There are so many more basil varieties that are grown in other parts of the world that have not found their way into American kitchens. I will enjoy adding such culinary opportunities to all of our kitchens.

Kerry, as you redirect your energies to herbs, microgreens and other edibles, what is your ultimate goal?

KH: My goal is to revolutionize the edibles category the way we did with orchids and bromeliads. I will always love beautiful plants and flowers, but this feels right to me at this time in my life. I have given all of my energy to ornamental horticulture for 42 years. It is time for something new, and this is what I want to do.



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Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 4 Chains Price Comparison — Tulsa, OK October 2013

PRODUCE ITEM	How Priced	WalMart Price	Reasor's Price	% Over Wal-Mart	Sprouts Price	% Over Wal-Mart	Super Target	% Over Wal-Mart	Warehouse Market	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Granny Smith (PLU #4139)	Lb	1.24	1.99	60.48%	1.49	20.16%	1.49	20.16%	1.49	20.16%
Apples other variety	Lb	1.67	2.29	37.13%	1.69	1.20%	1.79	7.19%	1.49	-10.78%
Apples - Red Delicious (PLU #4016)	Lb	1.47	1.69	14.97%	1.49	1.36%	1.49	1.36%	1.19	-19.05%
Avocados	Each	0.50	1.19	138.00%	1.89	278.00%	0.79	58.00%	0.89	78.00%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	0.54	0.56	3.70%	0.49	-9.26%	0.52	-3.70%	0.54	0.00%
Blueberries	16 oz	3.98	12.50	214.07%	2.99	-24.87%	3.99	0.25%	4.69	17.84%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	1.78	2.00	12.36%	0.99	-44.38%	1.99	11.80%	1.29	-27.53%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	1.88	2.39	27.13%	1.50	-20.21%	2.19	16.49%	1.89	0.53%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.88	2.39	27.13%	1.50	-20.21%	1.99	5.85%	1.89	0.53%
Lemons - Bulk	Each	0.40	0.79	97.50%	0.50	25.00%	0.49	22.50%	0.29	-27.50%
Limes - Bulk	Each	0.25	0.44	76.00%	0.20	-20.00%	0.39	56.00%	0.33	32.00%
Mangos	Each	1.16	0.99	-14.66%	0.74	-36.21%	0.79	-31.90%	0.89	-23.28%
Peaches - California	Lb	1.48	2.39	61.49%	1.09	-26.35%	1.99	34.46%	1.29	-12.84%
Pears - Bartlett	Lb	1.27	1.99	56.69%	1.29	1.57%	1.89	48.82%	1.49	17.32%
Pineapple	Each	2.88	4.49	55.90%	2.50	-13.19%	1.50	-47.92%	3.29	14.24%
Strawberries	Lb Package	2.28	3.50	53.51%	3.49	53.07%	2.29	0.44%	2.99	31.14%
Asparagus	Lb	3.74	5.99	60.16%	3.99	6.68%	3.49	-6.68%	3.99	6.68%
Beans - Green	2 Lbs	5.88	4.98	-15.31%	3.98	-32.31%	3.98	-32.31%	4.38	-25.51%
Carrots - Regular 1# Bag	Package	1.48	1.49	0.68%	0.69	-53.38%	0.99	-33.11%	0.89	-39.86%
Cauliflower	Each	2.78	2.99	7.55%	2.49	-10.43%	2.94	5.76%	2.49	-10.43%
Celery	Each	1.98	1.49	-24.75%	0.99	-50.00%	1.62	-18.18%	1.69	-14.65%
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.24	0.69	187.50%	0.25	4.17%	0.33	37.50%	0.50	108.33%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	0.68	0.99	45.59%	0.59	-13.24%	0.79	16.18%	0.59	-13.24%
Kale	Each	1.24	1.19	-4.03%	0.99	-20.16%	0.99	-20.16%	1.39	12.10%
Lettuce - Green Leaf	Each	1.58	1.59	0.63%	1.29	-18.35%	1.49	-5.70%	1.59	0.63%
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	1.48	1.69	14.19%	1.29	-12.84%	1.64	10.81%	1.89	27.70%
Lettuce - Red Leaf	Each	1.58	1.49	-5.70%	1.29	-18.35%	1.89	19.62%	1.59	0.63%
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Each	1.58	1.49	-5.70%	1.29	-18.35%	2.94	86.08%	1.59	0.63%
Mushrooms - White Package	1 Lb Pkg	2.96	3.78	27.70%	1.99	-32.77%	3.58	20.95%	3.38	14.19%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.58	0.99	70.69%	0.50	-13.79%	0.89	53.45%	0.69	18.97%
Peppers - Red	Each	1.68	1.49	-11.31%	0.99	-41.07%	1.79	6.55%	0.99	-41.07%
Potatoes - Red Bulk	Lb	0.88	1.09	23.86%	1.29	46.59%	0.99	12.50%	0.99	12.50%
Potatoes - Russet	5 Lb Bag	3.57	4.79	34.17%	2.99	-16.25%	3.49	-2.24%	2.99	-16.25%
Potatoes - Russet Bulk	Lb	0.98	0.99	1.02%	0.89	-9.18%	0.59	-39.80%	0.79	-19.39%
Squash - Zucchini	Lb	1.25	1.79	43.20%	1.49	19.20%	2.99	139.20%	1.29	3.20%
Sweet Potatoes	Lb	0.88	1.19	35.23%	0.88	0.00%	1.29	46.59%	0.89	1.14%
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	0.94	2.49	164.89%	0.99	5.32%	0.99	5.32%	1.49	58.51%
Coleslaw	1 Lb Bag	1.68	1.71	1.79%	1.49	-11.31%	1.69	0.60%	1.29	-23.21%
Salad - Caesar	14.6 Oz	3.28	8.32	153.66%	5.74	75.00%	6.72	104.88%	5.69	73.48%
Salad - Spring	10 Oz Bag	2.94	5.00	70.07%	6.98	137.41%	5.98	103.40%	7.76	163.95%
MARKET PLACE		70.52	101.29	43.63%	69.19	-1.89%	79.66	12.96%	76.75	8.83%

RED is adjusted price where package weight is different but can be adjusted for proper comparison.

found that two Latino oriented retailers, El Bodegon and Presidente Supermarkets, were able to cream Wal-Mart on produce pricing.

Of course, it is one thing for small ethnic retailers to beat Wal-Mart. The highly specialized offers at these stores — especially in grocery — tend to limit their appeal. Produce is particularly troublesome to larger retailers because anyone can buy the apples, pears, onions or potatoes at these ethnic markets, but the grocery brands and flavor profiles

tend to be specialized and make the stores not viable shopping options for large segments of the population.

Our Tulsa champion is different though, Sprouts has almost 150 stores in eight states. The fact that it won both our Dallas and Tulsa editions indicates it is not a question of our auditors hitting a particular special, but that the concept itself is low priced.

Sprouts has a complicated and intriguing history (see “Sprouts History” page 70) but

traces its roots back to a fruit stand. In an age when farmers markets are booming, Sprouts is a supermarket “inspired” by farmers markets. In an age in which all the excitement is built around small format stores, Sprout’s operates stores that average 28,000 square feet.

As Wal-Mart was rolling out across the country, consultants used to preach that retailers should try to be the anti-Wal-Mart. They meant that retailers should move upscale, high service, lots of organic, lots of



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perishables, be great at everything Wal-Mart was not great at.

Sprouts has put its own spin on being the anti-Wal-Mart, not so much upscale and not so much high-service. For example, Sprouts likes to pre-slice deli meat. Sprouts is heavy into organic and natural, with strong emphasis on produce, and the stores are the anti-Wal-Mart in physical facility as well as corporate culture.

Sprouts is interesting and may grow into a position to give Whole Foods Market a run

for its money. But the basic fact that Sprouts can beat Wal-Mart in pricing in the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report in both Dallas and Tulsa, and the fact that someone has beaten Wal-Mart in the last five matchups, all indicate that Wal-Mart is in need of a new strategy.

What Does Wal-Mart Want To Be?

One thinks of the enormous cost of the physical planet that Wal-Mart occupies in thousands upon thousands of Wal-Mart

SPROUTS HISTORY

Excerpts taken from Sprouts Farmers Market's website.

For nearly 70 years, the Boney Family has been synonymous with fresh produce, great prices and old-fashioned customer service. And today those family values are alive and well at Sprouts Farmers Market, the latest and most successful iteration of a business that began with very humble roots.

A LEGACY BEGINS

Henry Boney was a strapping young man from the West Texas town of Kress, where he grew up poor. Like many people in the Dust Bowl era, he moved to California seeking better fortune. He arrived there in 1934 and did what he could to make ends meet, including driving an ice cream truck. Through that job, he met Jessie Grame and married her

Supercenters, and one thinks of the booming business of Internet shopping. Retailers in general operate with high fixed costs, and Wal-Mart has a huge investment in real estate. It sells a lot of non-food items, which means it is heavily exposed to the Amazon.com phenomenon than a typical supermarket. What percentage of retailing has to shift online for it to pose real dilemmas for Wal-Mart's profitability? The answer: not very much.

Of course, before we worry too much about Wal-Mart, we can worry a bit about other players in the market. New management has revitalized a chain like Winn-Dixie, but look at the marketing positioning in Tulsa. If you are 17.4 percent over Wal-Mart, you are going to have trouble attracting the paycheck-to-paycheck crowd. But a store such as Sprouts, with its focus on natural and organic and its fun farmers market atmosphere, is bound to attract a better educated and foodie clientele.

Retail has become so segmented that each retailer desperately struggles to keep a clear position in the minds of consumers. One looks at the failure of the U.K.'s Tesco's Fresh & Easy concept in the U.S., and in a litany of problems that one can identify, the key failure was an inability to ever seize a clear positioning in the consumers' minds. Were they a convenience store? A grocery store? An organic/natural/healthy store? Nobody knew, and that fact played a significant role in its demise.

Thus the real dilemma posed by the 25th

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in 1943, at the age of 29.

The newlyweds then borrowed \$600 from her parents to buy a pickup truck, and used that to haul some peaches down from the orchards of Julian. They opened a fruit stand at the corner of 71st and El Cajon Boulevard near La Mesa, and a tradition was born.

Henry was a food retailer, a man who, because of his earliest roots, cared deeply about making fresh foods affordable to everyone. Over the years, Henry Boney and his family would start and sell many retail businesses, including Speedee Mart (the original convenience stores, eventually sold to Southland Corporation, parent company of 7-Eleven), Boney's, Bradshaw's and Superama.

The second generation of Boney's stores was opened in 1969 by Henry's sons, Stan, Steve, and later, Scott. The name was changed to Henry's Marketplace in 1997, in honor of the family patriarch...and that's where things got really complicated.

The Boney family ran Henry's until 1999, when the stores were sold to Wild Oats Markets, Inc. Stan, his son Shon, and family friends Kevin Easler and Scott Wing all worked for Wild Oats for a time, but eventually left and, to avoid the terms of a non-compete agreement that prohibited them from running stores in California, moved to Arizona to found Sprouts Farmers Market. The first store opened in Chandler, AZ, in 2002.

THE ROAD TO REUNION

In 2007, Whole Foods Market, Inc. purchased Wild Oats and sold the Henry's stores to Smart & Final Holdings Corp., which in turn was purchased by Apollo Management, one of the world's largest private equity firms.

In 2011, Apollo bought a controlling interest in the 63-store Sprouts, and Smart & Final sold Henry's to Sprouts — effectively reuniting two companies that had been founded by the same family, years apart. At the time, Henry's was operating 43 total store locations, comprised of 34 stores in California and nine stores in Texas operating under the Sun Harvest banner.

OUR GARDEN CONTINUES TO GROW

In 2012, Sunflower Farmers Market joined Sprouts' growing family of stores, bringing two leading grocers, together under the Sprouts Farmers Market banner. The addition of Sunflower's 35 stores expands Sprouts' geographic footprint in Nevada, Utah, New Mexico and Oklahoma and further extends its presence in California, Arizona, Colorado and Texas.

Even though Sprouts has become one of the fastest growing retailers in the United States, and an important player in the natural foods industry, we still hang our hat on that old-time, genuine feel of a little neighborhood fruit stand that started it all.

pb

iteration of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report: If Wal-Mart is not the low-price leader in Tulsa, or Lake Worth, or Savannah, or Dallas, or New Jersey — if it is

not the low price leader in *any* market any more — well what does mean for Wal-Mart? What is Wal-Mart? Recreating an image in the minds of consumers is fraught with peril. How

well Wal-Mart navigates this, and what Wal-Mart decides it wants to be . . . that will soon be evident in future editions of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report.

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Highland Park Market

Family values and community involvement are the backbone of this Manchester, CT, market's success. **BY OSCAR KATOV**

From the store's humble beginnings 125 years ago to its acquisition in 1958 by the Devanney family and on to present day, the owners and staff of Highland Park Market have strived to remain fully immersed in the community and provide support to local organizations and charities — a tradition that now extends to each of the five current locations throughout Connecticut. Timothy Devanney, president of Highland Park Market in Manchester, CT, draws upon lessons he learned from his father, Jack, and examines the shopping habits of today's consumer to effectively respond to customers' growing desires for quality products.

"We are a family-oriented store, and we have known families that shop here for generations," Timothy says. "We're firmly a part of the communities we serve." Timothy adds, as he introduces his two sons and two daughters to this writer in the store's meeting room.

"This is the 125th year of the Manchester store, which is somewhat remarkable," Timothy says, pointing out that his family purchased the store from its original owner, William White, over 55 years ago. "We're a family business — that's the unifying spark with each of the four children entrusted with specific responsibilities. Jim Jr. focuses on marketing and advertising; John is head of prepared foods; Cathleen focuses on the nutrition and wellness category; Molly is involved with store operations. But, each family member also keeps on eye daily on the whole operation. Everyone contributes insights and ideas that are useful to the operation. The stores have been a vital part of their lives from the beginning."

Knowing The Customers

Underlying the operation is a basic recognition. "Our image is built on providing the highest level of customer service and quality products," says Timothy. "We choose to not get involved in the losing battle of trying to offer the lowest prices. For example, one of our definitions of great customer service is providing a bagger to every



Highland Park's organic segment grew about 15 percent over the past 10 years, which is about 8 to 10 percent of the store's produce business.



customer at checkout — no self-checkout machines. We walk customers to their cars and empty the carts for them. I'm convinced that arrangement has far greater return on investment, with this simple courtesy continually earning praise from our customers."

"As far as our emphasis on product quality, I think we have a higher standard because we have been doing it for so long — I think we get it," says Timothy. "We go out and look at other beef displays; we look at other chicken and turkey farms. We're all over the place observing, because it may be that something else is coming along that's better, and we'll adjust."

"We recognize customers' attitudes when decision-making. We try to determine what stimulates them to come to the stores," says Timothy. "Our research shows that many shoppers hate going to the supermarket because it's a boring, mundane task," says Timothy. "We try making the experience fun for patrons with our sushi chefs, cake decorators, brick oven pizza ovens and animatronic animals in our produce departments. We also perform cooking demonstrations at some of our stores. People watch *Food Network* and they enjoy the show-business aspect of a live demonstration. Each store has full-scale meat and seafood depart-

ment with professional chefs, and a central bakery serves the four other stores with a wide range of breads and other items."

"Fresh, local produce is a key differentiating factor when positioning ourselves in the marketplace."

— Bruce Gibbons, Produce Director

"Fresh, local produce is a key differentiating factor when positioning ourselves in the marketplace," says Bruce Gibbons, Highland's produce director. "In our promotion activity, we see 'local flavor' — meaning Connecticut grown — as a trend that's increasing each year with product seasonality. Our five stores have good proximity to key farms. Our fruit supplier in Cheshire does our apples, peaches, and apple cider; our local vegetable supplier provides fresh corn, tomatoes, squash, peppers, and our strawberry supplier in Ellington takes care of all our needs. At the same time, our wholesaler

provides us with items such as bagged salads, carrots, celery and lettuce. Our farmers are terrific — when we need small fill-in orders quickly, they will deliver directly to the store that same day to save time."

Organics are contributing to Highland Park Market's produce sales, and it continues to expand. "Our organics segment has grown about 15 percent over the past 10 years, which is about 8 to 10 percent of our produce business now," Gibbons reports. "But quality has to be there. We're sensitive about where we buy. For example, we were one of the first retailers to make the switch in lettuce from Earthbound Farm to Olivia's Organics, which buys lettuce strictly grown in the U.S. Earthbound goes to Mexico for much of its lettuce and prints the information on the bag. Olivia's has a state-of-the-art facility to test the lettuce, when it comes in and when it is shipped to a customer. I understand Olivia's has never had a recall, which is unheard-of."

"Our success as a family company is not due solely to the Devanney family," says Timothy. "It's largely due to the extended family of 500 employees that make up the Highland Park Market. Expansion and success would be impossible if not for the ability of our extended family to train new employees and welcome them in as family members." **pb**





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7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

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Colorful and informative packaging assists in capturing impulse sales.

Using Packaging As Silent Salesmen

Packaging can play a vital role to help sell produce. **BY KEITH LORIA**

Studies show that approximately 70 to 80 percent of all produce purchase decisions are made at the shelf. Consumers are attracted to innovative packaging solutions with easily recognizable features and benefits that can be utilized immediately, enabling packaging to play a vital role in produce sales.

It's no wonder that companies are constantly introducing new packaging innovations to aid in the direct sales of produce at retail, because the packaging itself presents a unique selling advantage to the purchase of the produce item within.

Tony Monte, president of Monte Package Company, Riverside, MI, says to never underestimate the value of a packaging on the product, and that not investing money on this area could cost you sales in the long run.

"Even though the produce inside a container is the final determinant for repeat sales, packaging allows for brand awareness through printed matter, attached coupons, in-store sales, etc.," says Monte. "Consumers buy with their eyes. If you have great-looking produce in a well-designed and well-displayed package, you effectively attract the



eye of the consumer." While the appearance of the produce itself is a selling point, consumers also make their purchasing decisions on various other factors. Other preferences include the convenience of the package, the size of the container, whether the package is leak-proof and, lately, environmental awareness joins the list.

According to industry insiders, other popular trends include Zip-lock packages that enable re-use, tamper-evident packaging that ensures consumers of security, gusseted packaging that allows the product to stand upright, and clamshell packaging that provides durable stackable storage in the fridge.

"Produce comes in many varieties, so from the very beginning stages of development, we assign a product engineer to work closely with the customer to design the correct size of the package and perforations needed to extend the shelf life of the product," says Keri Lauderdale Olson, marketing director for Robbie Manufacturing, Inc. Lenexa, KS. "Robbie uses state-of-the-art laser perforation, which gives us the ability to customize each package to meet the requirements of the produce based on size, type and respiration rate. This helps

achieve the ideal modified atmosphere to enhance the look and taste of the produce."

Scott Koppang, director of marketing and sales for Package Containers, Inc. (PCI), Canby, OR, says the big topic of conversation around the industry is in "high performance" produce packaging; packaging that performs beyond its physical features and benefits to produce consistent, measureable revenue returns.

For example, PCI's familiar Home-Toter bags make several implicit promises to its

"We find that the retailer wants anything that will increase the store's velocity and margins."

— Jim Scattini, Sambrailo Packaging

customers: that the displays will attract the shopper's eye, that he or she will be prompted to buy more produce when displayed in PCI's Home-Toters versus picking the same produce from a bin, that one will appreciate the "grab and go" convenience, and that one often will make a purchase decision with or without a price-off prompt.

"During a single-day test in a Nebraska Affiliated Foods store earlier this year, 100 Home-Toters filled with 6.5 pounds of peaches were sold in only six hours, producing \$1,240 in additional revenue on a \$15 Home-Toter investment," Koppang says. "That's what I call high-performance packaging by any stretch of the imagination. We give customers a quick moment of pleasure in the midst of a shopping experience that can be tense and hurried."

Innovations Abound

Jack Tilley, market research manager of Inline Plastics Corp., Shelton, CT, says packaging is evolving to meet the needs of consumers who want healthy foods and snacks that fit their on-the-go lifestyles.

"Inline Plastics, through its patented Safe-T-Fresh line of tamper-evident and tamper-resistant containers, extends shelf-life and highlights the quality of the food containers," says Tilley. "We have expanded our tamper-resistant line to include sandwich wedge containers, car cup containers, and our line of hangable packaging, which enables retailers to merchandise produce items on racks and pegboards."

Jim Foster, marketing manager for Clear Lam Packaging, Inc. in Elk Grove Village, IL, says his company is developing and refining an innovative new packaging technology called PrimaPak Packaging System. The invention features a "Peel and ReSeal" design in a cube-friendly shape that stacks well on the shipping carton, on a pallet, in the truck, and on the retailer's shelf.

"The PrimaPak technology and cubing efficiencies allow brand owners to place more packages on the shelf and merchandise them in a unique way," Foster says. "When modi-

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fied atmosphere is utilized by the processor, the PrimaPak package can help extend product shelf life, giving the retailers more opportunity to sell fresh product.”

In 1987, Sambrailo Packaging was among the first produce packaging providers to work with berry shippers and ultimately move them

from the mesh and molded pulp baskets into a one-piece hinged, rigid-plastic container.

“We find that the retailer wants anything that will increase the store’s velocity and margins,” says Jim Scattini, vice president of marketing for Sambrailo Packaging, Watsonville, CA. “This includes many factors

with which a clamshell can assist, such as reducing shrink, increasing shelf life, and improving consumer appeal. The retailer also likes a package to be recyclable. Each of Sambrailo’s MIXIM clamshells is made from post-industrial recycled material and is 100 percent recyclable.”

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Fabri Kal manufactures a grab-and-go package for vegetables and fruits as a convenient snack. This package resembles a small brightly colored cup and utilizes a peel and reseal closure to maintain freshness. It can be placed throughout the store to attract customers to a healthy alternative snack.

Greg Berguig, vice president of marketing for Packaging Aids Corporation of San Rafael, CA, says the company specializes in industrial bag sealers, such as vacuum sealing and modified atmosphere packaging.

"We do quite a bit in the cherry industry and provide a smart way to protect the product from being touched or damaged, which is a growing concern in the industry," Berguig says. "There's no question that packaging goes hand-in-hand with produce sales. I think we're seeing that more and more each year."

Retailer Wants

Fresh produce is such a delicate category. Between shelf life, quality control and seasonality, there are so many variables for both the producer and the retailer. In a world of easy promises and less promising returns, retailers are looking to invest in products that truly make a difference, enhance the shopping experience, help sell more produce (increase turns, reduce shrink) and make them more money at the end of the day.

According to Inline's Tilley, with food safety standards being at such a high level of visibility, proper food safe packaging is one step in the chain that must be recognized and adhered to.

"Tamper-evident packaging is extremely important for retailers to ensure product quality and prevent consumers from opening containers in-store," he says. "This is especially vital when consumers are continually hearing stories about food recalls; it is crucial for retailers to provide customers assurance that its foods are safe."

Robbie Manufacturing's Olson adds that the thing the company hears most often from its retailer partners is the importance of freshness

and shelf life. "They want to provide their customers with a product that looks and tastes as fresh as the day they packaged it," Olson says. "While branding a package is important, we develop the right environment for the product first, and then we work with the client to incorporate their brand elements on the printed surface as well as recipes, coupons, nutrition facts and sustainable language."

Retailers are looking for produce packaging that will attract consumers to the shelf

though impactful graphics and intuitive package functionality. The package must protect the product (and consumer) with reliable tamper-evidence tools and a structure that minimizes damage to the product.

"Retailers continue to demand packaging that extends the product's shelf life though technology like modified atmosphere and designs that protect the contents," Clear Lam's Foster says. "Finally, the packaging must motivate the consumer to buy, try, and repeat."



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Labeling Lessons

Packaging that consists of high quality printable surfaces — allowing recipes and other promotional information to be on the package — such as mesh bags that have printable headers with recipes is in vogue.

Another new trend developing is the use of clamshells with a broad, smooth facing, which allows for creative labeling. This, in turn, affords the shipper opportunities to track its product and impart information to its customer base.

Robbie Manufacturing utilizes ExpandedGamut printing technology, which creates vibrant images and dramatic visuals for high shelf impact.

"This technique also allows us to provide consistent color management, which is very important to brand equity," Olson says. "Our color and tint range is almost limitless for creating those eye-catching designs that stand out from the competition."

Tristan Simpson, senior director of marketing for Ready Pac Foods, Inc., Irwindale, CA, sees an emphasis on label claims: "As regulations continue to change and marketers take advantage of key industry buzz words,

"Recycling, composting, a more efficient usage of petroleum or fossil fuels, and a reduction in environmental footprints for disposal methods are extremely important to consumers."

— Keri Lauderdale Olson, Robbie Manufacturing

we're finding that consumers are becoming increasingly confused about truly healthy foods and misleading marketing ploys."

"Ready Pac Bistro Bowls are a great example of both clean health and product transparency," says Simpson. "These on-the-go, chef-inspired bowls are produced in facilities that are USDA-verified with daily USDA oversight with quality assurance checks present from inception to the produce aisles. All finished products are identified by product expiration date and a designated lot number for complete traceability as well," reports Simpson.

Going Green

Scattini of Sambraile Packaging says the paradox of wanting to reduce packaging material from the waste-stream, plastic in

particular, versus the proven results that traditional commodity items have had when packaged in clamshells.

"Each of Sambraile's rigid plastic containers is a product of our patented MIXIM line of clamshells. They are designed for efficiency at the harvest and packing level. They also have a unique venting system for quick cooling and optimum air-flow during transportation for increased product per pallet versus the standard configuration," Scattini says. "The smooth sidewalls reduce mechanical damage and enhance consumer appeal at shelf level."

According to Monte of Monte Packaging, sustainable, recyclable and reusable all seem to be common themes in fruit and vegetable packaging. Plus, packaging manufacturers want to find the absolute sweet spot in terms

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of reducing the amount of packaging material while still protecting the produce.

"Recycling, composting, a more efficient usage of petroleum or fossil fuels, and a reduction in environmental footprints for disposal methods are extremely important to consumers," Robbie Manufacturing's Olson says. "Robbie is committed to helping our customers develop packaging solutions that meet as many sustainable goals as possible. We create Life Cycle Analysis using specialized software that calculates raw material usage, electricity/energy usage, emissions released from manufacturing the product, transportation of raw materials during the manufacturing of the package and the amount of reduction of solid waste introduced into landfills."

NatureWorks is a manufacturer of Ingeo, a compound made from renewable plant materials, which is utilized as a plastic for packaging throughout the produce industry. "When converted into packaging through thermoforming, Ingeo lends itself to a wide variety of shapes and sizes," says David Stanton, North American business manager, NatureWorks, Minnetonka, MN. "Ingeo is a food-safe resin, and this plastic has excellent



aroma and moisture barrier properties."

It's equally important for retailers to think beyond the end-use of packaging to the footprint created through transport and distribution.

"Our Peel and Reseal trays, for example (developed in collaboration with Clear Lam Packaging) not only reduce the amount of plastic used with each unit, they also create a product with a slimmer profile, says Ready Pac's Simpson. "This allows for an extra layer in each pallet during transport, thus reducing the number of trips and helping us reduce our carbon footprint," says Simpson, adding

that retailers who support proactive initiatives like this are helping the environment while also stocking more units on the shelves; both of which will contribute to their bottom line.

Packaging plays an important role in developing brand recognition and creating a larger shelf impact. Eye-catching appearance and unique shapes are particularly important to the younger generations.

"Often consumers buy with emotion — design, shape and color entice the consumer," Olson says. "Effective communication, functionality and eye-popping appearance make for packaging success."

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Berry sales in Produce rose above the annual average to 8.4 percent in the first quarter of 2013 due to a growing bounty of imports.

Consumer Demand Signals Delicious Sales On Berry Imports

Year-round demand coupled by domestic shortages in labor create environment for more imported berry varieties. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**

Exceptional health benefits, expanded availability and enhanced quality have boosted berries to the No. 1 category in the produce department in terms of dollars. The proof is in the numbers: Sales of strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries collectively contributed 8.2 percent of total produce department sales during the 52 weeks ending June 29, 2013, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based fresh food consulting firm.

What's more, this percentage rose above the annual average to 8.4 percent in the first quarter of 2013 due to a growing bounty of imports.

"Imports are important to us from both a sales standpoint and a customer satisfaction standpoint," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral and seafood for King's Super Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "Our customers want high-quality berries year-round."

Quantity And Quality Are Up

"Consumers are more aware of the need to increase produce intake for good health," says

Jason Kazmirski, produce and floral merchandiser for Tukwila, WA-based Northwest Grocers, which supplies 68 independent retailers in Washington, Oregon and Alaska, flying banners such as Thriftway, Red Apple Markets and IGA Market Fresh. "Look at McDonald's. They've even started serving fresh blueberries atop their oatmeal."

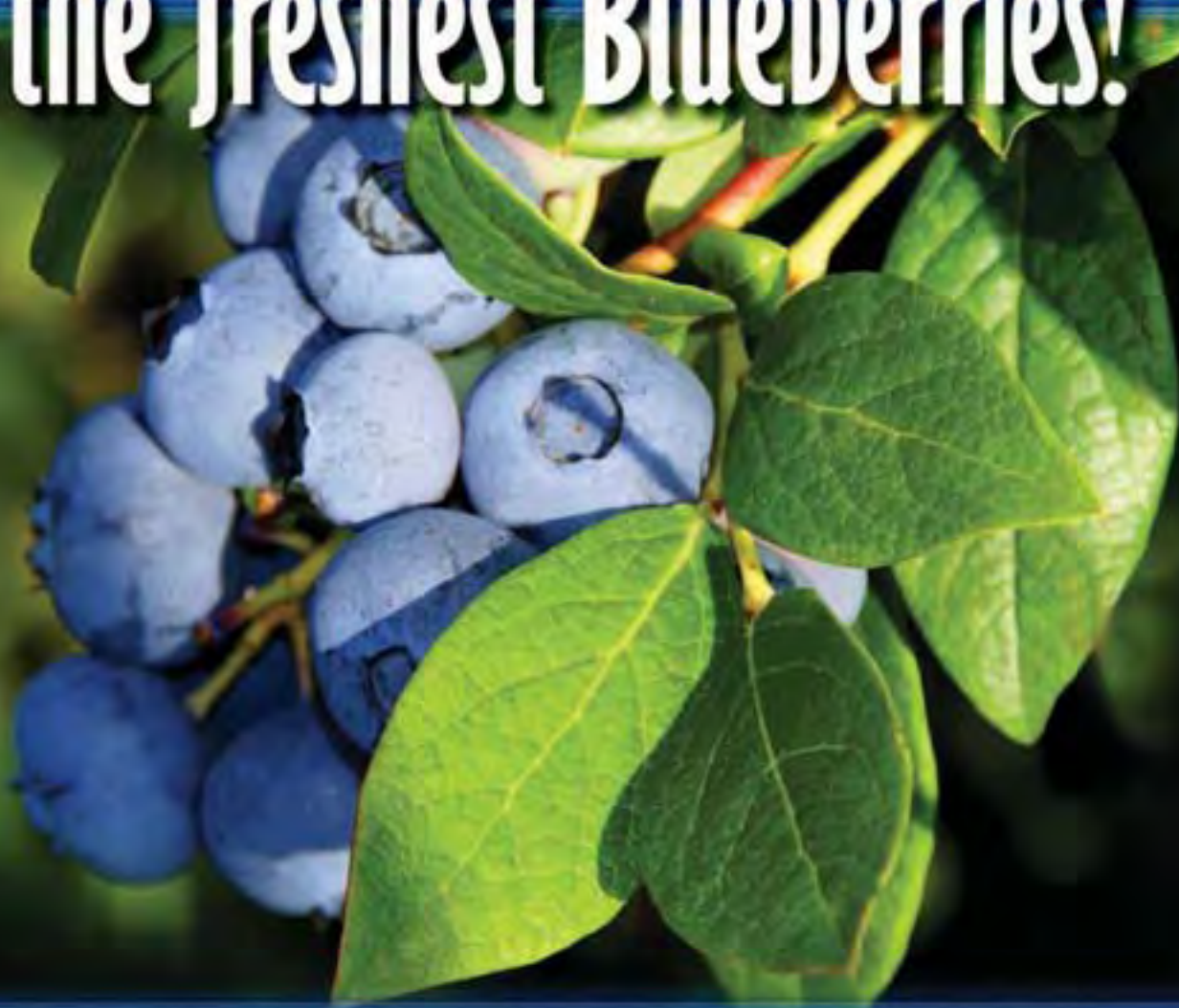
"It was about a decade ago when the posi-

tive health messaging about berries began to drive consumer demand," explains Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms, headquartered in Estero, FL. "At the same time, supplies began to transition from a small volume of berries available, only a handful of weeks in the year out of South and Central America, to strong supplies out of a number of countries that have — barring



Blueberry supply from Argentina to the U.S. has been stable during the past three years at around 9,000 tons, or 60 percent of the country's total export volume.

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weather — eliminated any gaps in supply in the U.S. market.”

“The science of delivering a perfect blueberry improves each season.”

— Bruce Turner, Curry & Company

“The incredible growth of the berry industry is truly a global phenomenon,” says Soren Bjorn, senior vice president of business and global technologies for Driscoll’s, based in Watsonville, CA. “The same new sources of imported berries that service the business needs of North America also compete for the global demand of berries around the world.”

At the same time, “blueberry growers in North America are facing labor shortages that are making it challenging to meet the growth in consumer demand,” adds Frances Dillard, Driscoll’s director of marketing. “The industry may see shifts in growing regions as the industry looks for solutions to increase the labor pool. This factor will have an impact on the growth of berry imports into the U.S.”

Beyond health attributes and availability, the third factor promoting the growth of berry imports is the planting of new varieties. “There’s been work on southern high-bush blueberry varieties that don’t require the chill hours for dormancy like the northern high bush need,” says Naturipe’s Roberts.

Bruce Turner, director of sales and business development for Brooks, OR-headquartered Curry & Company, Inc., which recently expanded its blueberry import program, agrees. “Growers have been fine-tuning their variety mix to provide consumers the best tasting fruit in each growing region and latitude, as well as working to improve their yields and quality.”

“In addition to quantity, another element leading to improved import quality is harvest timing,” Turner adds. “The science of delivering a perfect blueberry improves each season.”

“After harvest, phytosanitary protocols impact fruit and crops from certain origins need either fumigation or a cold treatment process, which can affect shelf life,” explains Tom Richardson, vice president of global development and manager of the berry division at The Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles, CA.

Inés Peláez, manager of Argentinean Blueberry Committee (ABC), based in Buenos

BIGGER PACK SIZES RING HIGHER BERRY SALES AT RETAIL

“Larger pack sizes on imported berries sell better than the small 4.4-ounce and 6-ounce size,” says Jason Kazmirski, director of produce and floral for Tukwila, WA-based Northwest Grocers. “This is especially true in March and April on blueberries where prices come down because shipping is by truck rather than by boat.”

“Ten years ago the entire blueberry crop from Chile was exported in 4.4-ounce clamshells. Today, that pack size is barely produced,” explains Bruce Turner, director of sales and business development for Brooks, OR-headquartered Curry & Company. “This is because the trend for several years has been to ship larger pack

sizes to help move the tonnage.”

Turner adds, “Now, the season begins with 6-ounce clamshells, but as soon as the volume begins to increase, retailers are able to receive and promote in pints, 18-ounce and even 24-ounce clamshells. The change in packaging gives retailers the opportunity to maximize sales during each week of the season, identifying the best promotional periods with their suppliers and then executing the plan to drive sales.”

As for other berries, “The 1-pound clamshell of strawberries dominates year-round,” says Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms, headquartered in Salinas, CA. “Raspberries and blackberries

are most often in 6-ounce clamshells, but we’re seeing a lot more 12-ounce out of Mexico. Since berries are the No. 1 category at retail, retailers can expand their displays by offering multiple pack sizes.”

“While there is certainly a trend toward larger pack types across the board, this will continue only up to the point where the fruit can still be handled well and make good arrivals,” explains Tom Richardson, vice president of global development and manager of the berry division at The Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles, CA. “Innovation in packaging will come not only in the amount of fruit it can hold, but that which can be delivered in perfect condition.” **pb**

Aires, notes there are protocol advances that are improving quality. “The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service published the 59-degree Fahrenheit treatment protocol for the bromide fumigation that is necessary for us to ship our blueberries to the U.S. market. This decrease in the temperature (from 70 degrees

Fahrenheit) for this process will have a positive impact on our fruit quality.”

Logistics are something that can provide for challenges as well as opportunities when it comes to imported berry quality. “Time to market is important,” notes Giumarra’s Richardson. “Ocean freight is generally taking

slightly longer than in the past as vessel lines work to conserve fuel and keep costs down. Adding even a day or two to sensitive product lines can have an impact on the final eating experience.”

However, Curry’s Turner says ocean shipments have notched improvements as well. “In



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“Blueberry growers in North America are facing labor shortages making it challenging to meet the growth in consumer demand. The industry may see shifts in growing regions as the industry looks for solutions to increase the labor pool. This factor will have an impact on the growth of berry imports into the U.S.”

— Frances Dillard, Driscoll's

the past several years the availability of controlled-atmosphere ocean containers gave huge improvement to the arrival quality of imported blueberries, and importers made huge improvements in their infrastructures to handle the berries as a separate commodity.”

Seasonal Outlook For Global Berry Varieties

The peak seasons for imported strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries occur at different times of the year in different

growing regions.

Strawberries. Mexico is the largest exporter of strawberries to the U.S. What drives this is available labor and land, especially in the optimum growing region of Central Mexico. The Mexican industry also figured out the best varieties to grow. At first, growers tried California varieties. Now, growers have switched to more Florida varieties with greater success.

Fresh strawberry imports from Mexico reached 231 million pounds in 2011, according to the Watsonville, CA-based Cali-

fornia Strawberry Commission's 2012 Acreage Survey. This statistic puts Mexican imports at nearly the same volume produced by Florida — the second largest U.S. production state after California.

“Expect to see a 20 percent increase in imported strawberries out of Mexico this season,” predicts Naturipe's Roberts.

“The Festival, San Andreas, Radiance varieties out of Mexico start in November and peak from late December through February 14, tapering off through March,” explains Craig Casca, chief executive and director of sales at Red Blossom Sales, Inc., in Fresno, CA. “Last year we shipped 1.2 million pounds of strawberries, and this year we estimate 2.5 million pounds. The deal fills in good quality straws that can ship to either the East Coast or West Coast in two days. This helps round out our program so we can cover our customers during the winter months.”

Blueberries. The consumption of blueberries today “is almost five times greater than what it was in the year 2000,” says Chloe Varennes, marketing manager at the Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Gourmet Trading Company.

Additionally, “North America is the largest consuming market in the world for fresh blueberries,” says Curry's Turner. “The role of imported blueberries has never been more important to meet that demand from October through March.”

Peruvian growers recognized the potentially lucrative nature of fresh blueberries and invested several million dollars in plantings over the past few years.

“We tested importing blueberries from Peru last season and expect to import more this year,” says Naturipe's Roberts. “The advantage is that they are a little earlier than Argentina, coming in late August through October.”

A new pilot program, undertaken by agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Customs & Border Protection and Florida Perishables Trade Coalition, may open the door to allow blueberries from Peru and Uruguay to be imported directly into Port Everglades and the Port of Miami beginning in October.

Previously, due to phytosanitary issues, imported blueberries from these countries — as well as grapes and other perishables — were first brought to North Atlantic seaports where cooler temperatures were thought to help stop fruit fly infestation and other pests. If successful, the pilot program will allow blueberries to reach South Florida retailers quicker, fresher and cheaper.

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“Argentina ships blueberries to the U.S. from late September through December. Volumes to the U.S. have been stable during the past three years at around 9,000 tons, or 60 percent of the country’s total export volume,” ABC’s Peláez.

“Argentina’s biggest challenge is logistics,” explains Naturipe’s Roberts. “They need to fly the fruit in, which puts them in a difficult financial position. As a result, they’ve taken out late varieties and put in high-yield early producing varieties, such as Snow Chaser and Primadonna, that have pushed the peak from late October to late September/early October — when the markets have stronger pricing on

a per pound basis.”

Naturipe will import its first organic blueberries out of Argentina this season. The company (which merged with Vital Berry Marketing S.A., the second largest berry grower/exporter in South America) is the largest importer of organic blueberries into the U.S. — supplying approximately 25 percent of total volume.

“Just over half of all fresh blueberries imported to the U.S. originate from Chile,” according to Karen Brux, managing director North America, for the Fresno-CA-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA).

“Chile has always dominated the supply of

imports,” says Curry’s Turner. “In the past decade, blueberry imports from Chile have increased from 12 million pounds in 2002/03 to 150 million pounds this past season. Chile ships fruit by boat from November through April.”

“We expect the volume of blueberries out of Chile to grow by 10 to 15 percent this year,” says Naturipe’s Roberts. “Most of this growth will come from young acreage. Peak arrivals usually run from the last week in December through February/March.”

Blueberry imports are poised to grow by leaps and bounds out of Mexico over the next five years. “The logistical advantage is significant,” Roberts explains. “Fruit takes one to two weeks by truck rather than two to three weeks by boat.”

Family Tree Farms Marketing, in Reedley, CA, recognized the opportunity and is filling the production gap between South America and California by cultivating proprietary varieties of blueberries that come from an Australian breeding program, in Mexico.

“This was our first year of commercial production,” says Dovey Plain, marketing coordinator at Family Tree Farms. “We’ll bump that up by around 50 percent in 2014, but 2015 will be a big growth year as the first bushes planted hit full production. Currently producing varieties are available from mid-March through late April. Other varieties yet to come in to production will be available starting in February.”

Raspberries. The U.S. imports most of its fresh raspberries from Mexico in November through May. More than 95 percent of raspberries grown in Mexico for export are

PRICE BARRIERS GETTING LOWER

The combination of supply and demand is one of the biggest factors on seasonal berry pricing, despite the fact that they are fairly independent of one another, whether produced domestically or imported. “However, the price gap between imports and domestic product can still be as high as 50 to 100 percent,” says Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms, headquartered in Salinas, CA. “The industry needs this in order to be profitable. Yet an increase in supply from offshore especially during peak harvests is narrowing this spread.”

Bruce Turner, director of sales and busi-

ness development for Brooks, OR-headquartered Curry & Company, agrees. “We don’t really see the gap so much anymore because the larger volume of imports and the larger pack-styles have led to very promotable retail pricing year round.”

“The price of berries is actually quite reasonable,” asserts Tom Richardson, vice president of global development and manager of the berry division at The Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles, CA. “Considering that every single fresh berry that most people eat are picked by hand, one by one. Then in many cases they are transported long distances with accompanying high trans-

port costs. Except for short windows in the year, imported berries are actually very competitively priced and can be a great promotional item in our fall and winter months.”

According to Jason Kazmirski, director of produce and floral for Tukwila, WA-based Northwest Grocers, “The price point may not be as hot as it is in the summer, but we are able to run imported berries as a feature ad during the winter. It’s my job to talk with our suppliers and organizations like the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association to find out what’s happening weather-wise or industry-wise.”

pb

“Winter holiday promotions tend to be very traditional, so think about using berries as a promo item during those non-holiday periods. Tie-in with cold-weather products like oatmeal, muffins and cookies.”

— Dovey Plain, Family Tree Farms

proprietary varieties.

“We’ll be importing more than double the amount we did from Mexico last year. This represents about a 20 percent increase for the industry,” says Naturipe’s Roberts.

Blackberries. Mexico provides approximately 95 percent of blackberries imported to the U.S. from October to May, with smaller amounts from Guatemala. Blackberry imports have skyrocketed from 29.6 million pounds in 2006 to 95.7 million pounds in 2010 (or a 223 percent increase) according to June 2012-released data from the U.S. Agricultural Marketing Resource Center in Washington, DC.

“Proprietary varietal research in blackberries isn’t quite as advanced as that of blueberries and raspberries,” explains Naturipe’s Roberts. “The Tupi variety dominates as it has a good flavor and holds up well on the shelf. However, we do have a new variety that is starting production but isn’t named yet.”

“Driscoll’s showcases its proprietary blackberry varieties grown in Central Mexico with a special packaging label along with point-of-sale (POS) materials to attract shoppers’ attention and trial,” says Dillard. “This type of program is not about the growing region, but it’s about the consumer’s delightful experience with great tasting berries.”

Capitalize On Seasonal And Seasonless Merchandising

Competition for shelf space in the produce department is lessened in the winter. This is an opportunity for merchandising imported berries. “Customers expect to find berries year-round,” says King’s Kneeland. “I don’t think there’s much, if any, seasonality in their minds anymore.”

According to CFFA’s Brux, “Consumers increasingly see blueberries as a ‘must have’ produce item. They are great tasting, convenient and incredibly versatile.”

Versatility is driving uses for berries beyond the traditional seasonal pie or fresh consumption. “We’re seeing foodservice expand its menuing of berries to fine dining applications

such as roast duck with blackberry sauce and barbecued ribs with blueberry chipotle blueberry sauce,” says Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Pompano Beach, FL-based Southern Specialties.

At the same time, there are unique winter-time opportunities for merchandising berries.

“It’s important for retailers to not think of imported blueberries as a winter fruit, but to think of them as one of the most profitable items in the produce department,” says Curry’s Turner. “Blueberries should be marketed the same as the ‘peak of the summer’ season with large displays, multiple displays and pack sizes. Most of the volume of imports has a six-week peak in January and February, so the trend has been to promote the larger pack-styles during this time.”

“Winter holiday promotions tend to be very traditional so think about using berries as a promo item during those non-holiday periods,” says Family Tree’s Plain. “Tie in with cold-weather products like oatmeal, muffins and cookies.”

“Chilean blueberries are in season during numerous holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chinese New Year and Valentine’s Day. In an effort to help retailers capitalize, the CFFA offers usage ideas and holiday-specific messages to promote blueberries,” says Brux. “In addition, our retail programs consist of in-store display contests and merchandising support programs that help draw shoppers to blueberries and drive sales. We will also consider opportunities for cross merchandising and joint promotions, working with retailers to negotiate secondary displays outside of the produce department.”

The availability of blueberries around the New Year allows us the opportunity to showcase the nutritional value of blueberries,” says Driscoll’s Dillard. “We also provide consumers with information and inspiration on how to incorporate blueberries into a healthy lifestyle. An integrated marketing campaign includes in-store signage, recipe development and nutritional information from Driscoll’s registered dietitians.”

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California Citrus Brightens Produce Sales This Season

The desirable attributes of quality California citrus are helping today's produce executives enhance their departments to attract and retain a larger portion of today's discerning shoppers.

BY SHEYNA STROMMAN

Today's shopper demands more — more selection, more flavor, more freshness, more convenience, more experience, more organic, and more locally grown choices. And today's produce executives are finding innovative ways to fill those demands by expanding their selections and extending the availability of produce department favorites — like citrus from California.

As partners in the produce department, California citrus growers, shippers, packers and marketer recognized early on that citrus products from the Golden State are uniquely poised to meet the increasing demands of today's health-minded, time-crunched shopper.

"The vibrant coloring, smooth texture, and roundness of California oranges are extremely appealing to the eye and to the touch," says citrus industry veteran Dee DePorter, president of La Quinta, CA-based C&D Enterprizes, Inc. DePorter credits the state's ideal climate conditions for producing an exceptional tasting fruit that shoppers love.

Fred Berry, marketing director for Mulholland Citrus, Inc., based in Orange Grove, CA, says the state is "blessed" with a unique combination of soil and weather — a

good distribution of hot days and cool nights — which is nearly perfect for producing a quality piece of fruit with a balanced acid-to-sugar ratio.

"When California is in the market, that's the prime time and the best quality citrus the consumer will enjoy throughout the year," Berry says.

Tracy Jones, vice president of domestic sales for Booth Ranches, LLC, a family owned and operated company with 7,500 acres stretching from Orange Cove to Maricopa, CA, says California growers are committed to excellence. "With only one grower and no outside pressures, Booth Ranches makes the best decisions for our customers and picks the fruit only when it is full of flavor and ready to eat."

Alex Teague, chief operating officer for the Santa Paula, CA-based Limoneira Company — the world's largest vertically integrated lemon supplier in the United States — adds, "State-of-the-art growing practices, a "foodie" culture and the popularity of specialty citrus are also factors that drive the California citrus market."

Specialty Oranges

"With food television shows, blogs and magazines on the rise, consumers are very

enthusiastic about new and unique culinary items," surmises Joan Wickham, advertising and public relations manager for Sunkist Growers, Inc. in Sherman Oaks, CA.

"The consumers' desire for unique and new items resonated with the citrus industry. Newer and rediscovered varieties that have unique flavors and nutritional profiles are increasing in popularity," Wickham adds.

Wickham and Teague both point to varieties like tangy Cara Cara navel oranges, tart Moro (or blood oranges), Meyer lemons and pink lemons as California citrus fruits that produce executives can utilize to reignite shoppers' excitement about citrus.

Moro oranges have a tart, raspberry flavor, while Cara Cara navels have a sweet cranberry taste with lower acidity.

"Cara Caras gained popularity over the past several years because of their distinctive rich pink pulp that results from the presence of Lycopene, a natural antioxidant," says Wickham. California Cara Caras also pack a nutritional punch with 30 percent more vitamin A than conventional oranges.

Booth Ranches' Jones sees a bright future in spring navels, which are harvested from late January through April and have a high



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Taste, appearance and price make California citrus a winning bet in the produce department.

sugar/low acid ratio that provides an excellent eating experience.

"We are in the early stages of developing our spring navel program with young trees coming into production," Jones says. "We will see a major growth in production over the next five years as these trees mature."

Jones also notes that the late season navel varieties are some of the best eating varieties available with excellent sugar levels and juice content. "Putting a full-seasoned, mature, ready-to-eat navel orange next to an early season orange is no competition," says Jones.

Jones and Wickham both see great promotional opportunities in Valencia oranges from California.

With a growing focus and awareness about healthy living, fresh and whole fruit juicing is becoming a popular trend among consumers. Wickham and Jones say California's Valencia oranges are poised to fill this niche as a healthy and delicious ingredient for juicing in foodservice applications and for home juicers.

"Retailers who choose to use California Valencias will get a fresh, juicy piece of fruit at a competitive price," Jones says.

Clementines/Mandarins

Mulholland Citrus' Berry says produce executives are also using California mandarins and clementines to appeal to time-crunched parents. "Shoppers are turning to easy-to-peel citrus varieties, like California mandarin oranges and clementines, to provide healthy snacks and lunchbox

options for their kids, and California Citrus growers took notice," says Berry.

As a vertically integrated company that specializes in clementine and mandarins — from growing and propagating citrus trees to farming, packing and marketing — Mulholland Citrus keeps its eye on the mandarin market literally from the ground up. According to Berry, Mulholland watched California growers more than quadruple their clementine and mandarin acreage in less than a decade — from roughly 10,000 acres in 2006 to 42,000 acres last year. The growth is in response to consumer demand.

"Consumers want a piece of fruit that's snackable, segments easily, and doesn't take up lots of room in a lunchbox. I think consumers like the convenience and taste of clementines. It's all right there in that little package," Berry says.

Around 2001, the most prominent variety of easy-peel citrus was the Satsuma mandarin. These fruits of Japanese origin were marketed predominantly in the western United States and Canada. They were not shipped east unless weather demanded it.

The East Coast saw a lot of mandarin imports from Spain, but that all changed around 2001 and 2002 when California growers saw that the clementine was a good product, with excellent potential for augmenting the navel orange market.

"At the forefront of this citrus explosion was the W. Murcott mandarin, a variety that Mulholland Citrus helped introduce to the



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U.S. market,” says Berry. “Tom Mulholland, the company’s owner, began as a nurseryman by trade. He traveled throughout the world looking for the next big thing in citrus.” Berry says Mulholland recognized the Moroccan mandarin as a great piece of fruit. It has since become the most widely planted mandarin, according to Berry.

California’s clementine season runs from mid-November through January; however, the California citrus community adapted to extend the season for smaller, sweet, easy-to-peel varieties. For example, Satsuma mandarins are available beginning in mid-October. Later season varieties, like the Ojai Pixie tangerines are available mid-March to May, and Gold Nugget mandarins are available mid-March to June. Each variety helps extend the clementine season into the early summer months.

Today, California mandarins and clementines are available domestically from October to mid-May. The state exports some fruit to Mexico, southwest Asia, Australia as well as Central and South America. “The products we grow here are well received globally,” says Berry.

“An easy-peel variety that may be less familiar with consumers, but we at Sunkist believe holds lots of promise, is the Minneola tangelo,” says Wickham. “This fruit, with its bold, tangy flavor, is bursting with juice and is available from January to April.”

One Size Does Not Fit All

Across the board, California citrus suppliers have seen an increased demand for different size packaging.

Wickham says Sunkist saw a growing demand for pouch bags, which allow for colorful, eye-catching graphics that pop on retail display shelves.

According to Jones, who forecasts supply and demand as well as creates all of Booth Ranches’ marketing and point-of-sale materials, movement on both navel and Valencia bags increases annually, as do requests for private-label bagged citrus.

“We’ve invested in additional bagging machines to stay ahead of our customers’ needs,” Jones says. The most popular Booth Ranches package is a 4-pound bag, followed by an 8-pound bag. Jones says bags are often displayed using a high graphic triwall bin and pop up display bin. “This year we are offering a full wrap bag on navels and Valencias along with our traditional header bags.”

Teague of Limoneira Company sees produce department packaging trending to recyclable, easy-to-use, stand-up pouches.

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quality citrus products.**

No matter the package, overall education in the produce department will become increasingly important as produce executives are providing greater selection in their stores. Sunkist's Wickham cites a recent study that found consumers are often confused shopping for produce.

"As new items are being introduced all the time, retailers need a method of ensuring consumers can easily find new items and learn about their taste profile, nutrition or recipe usage," Wickham explains. To help educate consumers about its citrus products, Sunkist offers interchangeable header cards for point-of-purchase displays that present the information a consumer needs, including QR codes that allow smartphone access to great recipes and tips.

Year-Round Availability

New citrus varieties are helping to augment the long-time favorites in the produce department (think navel oranges) and provide produce executives and shoppers a nearly seamless, year-round supply of quality citrus products.

La Quinta's DePorter remembers back 15 years ago when the California Citrus crop would end in February. It now extends into June; thanks, in part, to later-blooming citrus varieties and other citrus grove innovations.

"Year-round availability helped grow demand for California citrus," says Mulholland Citrus' Berry. "That consistent supply may, at times, take a little zing out of the market because people know it's going to be there year-round; but overall, demand for mandarins in the summertime has increased over the past 10 years — just because of availability."

That's an important indicator for the

NEW LEMON VARIETIES ARE SEEDLESS, TASTEFUL AND BEAUTIFUL

Growth in the California citrus category isn't confined to navels and mandarins. Shoppers are also taking notice of California lemons.

Joan Wickham, advertising and public relations manager for Sunkist Growers, Inc. in Sherman Oaks, CA, says seedless options within the lemon category are bringing convenience to both foodservice and home cooks.

Home cooks and foodservice providers may also consider the new flavor profiles available in fresh California lemons from varieties like Zebra and Meyer lemons.

Zebra lemons are pink on the inside with a yellow-and-green striped rind and slightly less acidic than conventional lemons. "These lemons are prized as much for their beauty as they are for their flavor," Wickham says.

Originally from China, Meyer lemons are thought to be a cross between a regular lemon and a mandarin or an orange, Wickham explains. Juice from a Meyer lemon is sweeter and less acidic than other lemons. "They also have a thin, smooth rind that is bright in color — making them a culinary, and produce department, favorite," Wickham adds. **pb**

overall popularity and place for California citrus in the produce department, where shelf space is increasingly scrunched. "Twenty-five years ago, produce department managers had 25 produce products to display," says DePorter. "Today, there are 125 items or more." Each competes for its share of shelf space, and that puts pressure on all produce

categories to perform.

Taste, appearance and price make California citrus a winning bet in the produce department. "Many stores are selling citrus for three times what they're paying for it," says DePorter. That mark-up, and the consistent demand, make it a profitable item for store managers and a great value for shoppers. **pb**

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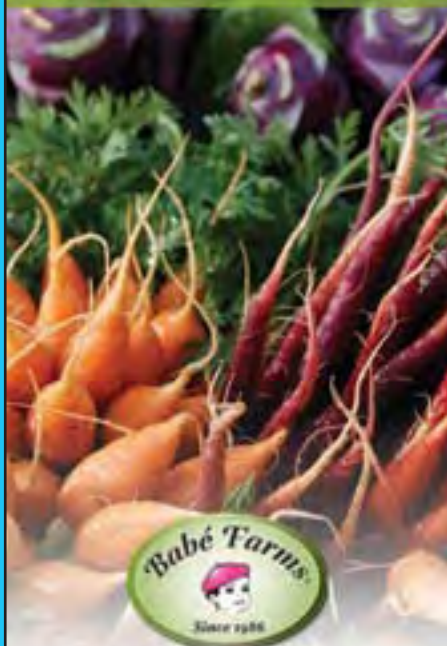
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When most of the nation clamors for locally grown, Florida comes calling with a diversity of crops.

The Fall Is Florida Fresh Time

Other states may struggle with fresh inventory during the fall, but that's Florida's time to shine. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

As summer fruit grows sparse on the shelves, supermarkets and grocery stores along the Eastern seaboard and beyond turn to Florida growers to keep the produce department stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables.

The state is the national headquarters for citrus, tomato and strawberry production in the fall and winter, but Florida also produces an abundance of squashes, greens, avocados and tropical favorites including guavas and carambolas.

Florida leads the nation in production of fresh market grapefruit, tomatoes, squash, sweet corn and cucumbers. It ranks second in oranges, tangerines, bell peppers and strawberries, and harvests a majority of the snap beans grown in the entire country.

Retailers have an abundance of promotional help available to them as they merchandise this bountiful harvest. Shippers, commodity associations, and agencies also have created effective promotional materials for the Florida Fresh produce as it arrives in the fall, led by the well orchestrated campaign developed over the past decade by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS).

"We maintain a foundation of proven marketing practices and continually examine

other means that will achieve enhanced consumer and sales penetration," says Dan Sleep, senior analyst in the division of marketing and development at the FDACS, Tallahassee, FL.

The state spends nearly \$1 million annually on a promotional campaign that includes extensive point-of-purchase materials, and this year, funds will be augmented by an investment for television ads.

"We incorporate a number of marketing tools to assist in promoting our Fresh from Florida commodities for retailers to feature," Sleep says. "Most common is a circular ad incentive for each 'Fresh from Florida' item placed in the stores' advertisements. During 2012-13, our 52 retail partners ran 2,323 Florida circular ad items — our best year ever!"

The department worked with more than 11,000 retail stores last year and plans to increase that number this year.

"We open new markets, strengthen existing ones, and introduce products into markets often left behind. We're helping our farmers by maintaining a highly visible and respected brand," Sleep says.

How Local Is Local?

One of the undeniable mega trends in the produce department is consumer interest in

buying locally grown.

"Consumers are definitely attracted to the 'locally grown' identity, as are restaurants," says Andy Brown, vice president for marketing at B&W Quality Growers, Fellsmere, FL. "It has become an important focus of our efforts and merchandising support."

B&W's most important fall vegetables out of Florida are watercress, red watercress and wild baby arugula.

The trend is undeniable, but the meaning of the phrase "locally grown" is also vague. "Is local 200 miles, 400 miles, or 500 miles? We're only 1,300 miles out of New York, compared to 2,500 miles from Mexico. That makes us more local," asserts Tom O'Brien, president of C&D Fruit and Vegetable, Bradenton, FL. "A buyer in New Jersey isn't going to advertise Florida produce as local, but it's still the freshest stuff out there during the fall and winter."

The state's proven market practices, beginning with a tagline that identifies the origin of the produce, capitalizes on the reputation of the state's fruits and vegetables, yet remains effectively flexible when it comes to the question of what is "local."

"We're 'Fresh from Florida' all the way," FDACS' Sleep says. The charm of "Florida Fresh" is that it fits with the many different definitions of locally grown produce.

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“Local means something different to each person. For Publix, local means doing business in the area in which we operate in — Florida being predominant for us,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix, Lakeland, FL.

“It makes good business and environmental sense to purchase local goods whenever possible. There’s less freight, less time from farm to fork, and it supports the local economy,” adds Brous. This philosophy resonates the length of the Eastern seaboard and, in one case of an

extraordinary recent promotional success, South Korea.

“‘Fresh from Florida’ is a tagline that retailers should remember from the fall to the spring,” says Mike Shapiro, sales representative at Weis-Buy Farms, Inc., Fort Myers, FL. “Florida is one of the only states in the U.S. that grows and ships fresh produce during this time. The produce costs less to ship for receivers in the east. The varieties and quality of Florida produce is what people look for at their grocery stores.”

Weis-Buy Farms is a nearly 50-year-old firm that buys and sells the major fruits and vegetables the state produces — including all of the varieties of tomatoes, pepper and watermelons grown and shipped from Florida.

Florida is freshest in the fall and winter, but the issue can be whether it is also the cheapest. “It’s still a supply-and-demand business. Retailers know Florida is the capital of fresh produce in the late fall and winter. Locally grown has become a very strong category, but lots of people still shop by price. They may say one thing and do another,” O’Brien says.

The advantage and challenge for Florida produce in the fall is that nearly all of the competition is international.

“We’re made in the U.S. — and consumers seem to naturally love Florida — maybe it’s the sunshine; we think it’s sunshine and superior products! Our toughest obstacle in promoting is probably being the only game in town when we’re in production,” FDACS’ Sleep confesses. “Unlike most of the U.S., which produces in the summer months up to maybe October, our prime production is from November to June. So we face international competition basically alone — and that’s a tough bunch of competitors. Our edge is great products, great prices and a handling and distribution system second to none.”

300 Varieties

Nearly all of the many crops for which Florida is known become most abundant when most of the nation’s farms take a rest.

“Aside from citrus, fall and winter are great months for Florida produce,” Brous says. “Harvesting typically begins in November, once the Georgia supply of produce lessens due to changing weather conditions. Florida is plentiful in fall produce and supplies much of the U.S. east of the Mississippi.”

The variety includes many mainstays of the produce department.

“There’s yellow squash, corn, eggplant, zucchini, an assortment of peppers and much more,” Brous says. “We watch the weather carefully beginning in December, as there tends to be frost and freezing conditions in Florida.”

Florida produces nearly 35 million cartons of strawberries a year, at a farm gate value of around \$400 million.

“We start in December, mostly right after Thanksgiving, and we go as long as there is a market — usually until April or May,” says Ted Campbell, executive director of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Inc., Plant City, FL. “The demand is steadily growing, but with low market pricing, there’s no incentive to



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expand acreage. In the past 10 years, Florida strawberry growers probably doubled well over their production; there's been substantial growth in the past 10 years due to better varieties. The flavor and shelf life are enhanced."

Most Florida strawberry promotion is done by grower-shippers, but the Florida Strawberry Growers Association started its own campaign.

"We do general marketing, lots of internet marketing, like Facebook and other social media," Campbell says. "We received a grant to do a billboard campaign, and we're experimenting. But most of the growers want to do their own thing when it comes to promotion."

The Maitland, FL-based Florida Tomato Committee (FTC) also has its own promotional programs that include a range of in-store activities.

"The Committee will be coordinating promotions this season to help spur tomato sales movement," says Samantha Daves, director of education and promotion for the FTC. "Through communications and promotions with retailers, we provide customized sales contests, consumer loyalty coupon programs, in-store radio, cooking demonstrations and sampling programs, display contests, as well as advertising circulars and

newsletter/magazine support."

A range of point-of-purchase (POP) materials is available from the committee to promote Florida tomatoes. "The Committee also provides POP promotional posters, shelf cards and tear-off recipe pads to help spark merchandising creativity," Daves says. "The tear-off recipe pads are great because they give busy shoppers ideas for what to prepare, and they also sell other fresh produce items in the department — a win-win for everybody!"

The continuing development of new and better varieties by University of Florida plant breeders is increasing demand for tomatoes.

"New varieties of tomatoes are becoming available with a longer shelf life," Weis-Buy Farms' Shapiro says. "The tomatoes have a better taste, and that's something consumers are asking for when they buy Florida tomatoes."

These new varieties make it possible for shippers to extend the season and the range of tomato SKUs. "We start with Florida tomatoes from Quincy, Florida, in September with stake tomatoes. The season runs through June with Ruskin, Florida, product," Shapiro says. "During the season, tomatoes are grown and shipped from Palmetto, Florida, to Immokalee, Florida. Varieties include vine ripens, greens,

cherries, grapes, place packs and romas. The assortment and flavor of Florida tomatoes are some of the best in the world. We also have a focus this year on pepper."

Weis-Buy also is expanding with a number of other Florida fall fruits and vegetables.

"We are introducing a new package of mini cucumbers. Starting in the fall, Weis-Buy will offer: green pepper, tropical items (such as yuca, plantain, chayote, avocado), pineapple, papaya, chili peppers (such as cubanelle peppers, finger hots, Hungarian wax peppers, jalapeno, long hots, poblano chili pepper, Serrano pepper), cabbage, citrus (grapefruit, oranges), cucumbers, squash, potatoes, asparagus, egg plant and melons, as well as avocados and tropicals," Shapiro says.

Fall is the season for Florida avocados, carambolas and guavas to take the shelf space created by the exiting fresh peaches, nectarines and plums.

"As the summer fruit season winds up, the store shelves get filled with Florida tropical fruit. Merchandising depends on the retailer's focus," says Peter Leifermann, director of sales and procurement at Brooks Tropicals, Homestead, FL. "We often have our own tropical section; some retailers across the country have a domestic tropical section. Or if it is a Florida store, you'll find 'Florida Grown' on the displays."

Brooks Tropicals provides recipes, custom signage and boxes with usage information for a variety of tropical fruits.

"Our overall business is increasing, and 30 percent of it is within Florida," Leifermann says. "Publix is a very large customer of ours, and merchandise goes from their distribution center throughout the Southeast. Wal-Mart and Winn-Dixie also have distribution centers."

The Florida avocado harvest extends all the way from May through March, but fall is when demand takes off.

"Customers are looking for fruit they can tailgate with. They are looking for tropicals that go with grilling," says Mary Ostlund, marketing director at Brooks Tropicals. "You can use Florida avocados like mayonnaise; but unlike mayonnaise, you don't have to worry that it will go bad. You can use avocados in salads, dips and chutneys that can be brought to the tailgate party." The versatility of avocados makes them a natural for developing a rotation of displays and promotions.

"Retailers are smart. They change it around to make it interesting," Ostlund adds. "One week you'll see a salsa display, the next week a guacamole display, and the next a salad display."

Another wildly popular Florida tropical



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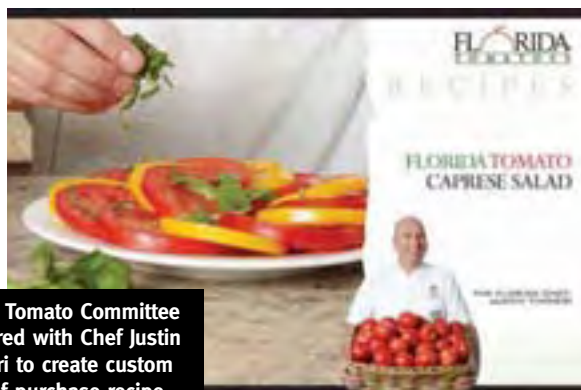
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fruit that takes off in the fall is carambola.

"Carambola, or star fruit, is a huge item through the fall," Leifermann says. "It's a good back-to-school fruit because kids love it, and it's healthy. It also goes with grilling. We've found record growth in the calendar year 2013. It is one of the fastest growing tropical fruits from Florida."

The Florida carambola harvest goes all the way from the end of June through early March, with peaks in September and in January to February.

As the nights get milder and the summer rains stop, growers are not fighting some of the tropical diseases, and Florida guava production becomes more consistent.

Florida vegetable shippers also reach their peak in the fall.

"Bell peppers, squash, cukes, chili peppers and eggplant are L&M Farms' most important products that we grow for the fall season

in Florida," says Greg Cardamone, general manager for vegetables at L&M Companies Inc., Raleigh, NC. "Our Florida Farms also produce cabbage and broccoli in late fall and winter."

L&M offers grower information and seasonal promotions for its Florida customers.

"L&M has been farming for 30 years in Florida. We will always support Florida Agriculture," Cardamone says. "'Fresh from Florida' says more than people realize — we harvest, pack, cool and ship in the same day to retailers in Florida. Florida consumers are educated on locally grown, and they look forward to the seasonal produce from Florida growers."

Specialty lettuces and other greens from Florida also are finding important niche markets.

"Consumers and restaurants have enthusiastically embraced the stronger flavors and potent nutrition of baby leaf specialties like

watercress and wild baby arugula," B&W's Brown says. "They are almost surprised to see that this level of quality is available 'Fresh from Florida.' We are finding great success on building a local following who requests products by the B&W brand."

B&W offers retail support through store menu programs and in-store price promotions that encourage trial and multi-unit purchases, according to Brown.

"Though we probably have around 25 major fruits and vegetables with real international reach, we produce more than 300 varieties of fruits and vegetables," FDACS' Sleep says. "So, as we approach November, our farmers are drastically increasing production. We're the greenest businesses in town and supply tens of millions of cartons of products to markets from Atlanta to New York to Chicago and everywhere in between — every month up to July."

pb

GLOBAL REACH

Florida fruits and vegetables are already dominant in the fall and winter east of the Mississippi and up into Canada. And the state is even having success taking the 'Fresh from Florida' message all the way to South Korea.

"JinWon Trading Company, LTD in South Korea is our distribution partner for several retail chains. It has done an exceptional job with increased business in what we were advised was a mature, stable market for Florida grapefruit," Sleep says.

The department has spent years steadily developing the marketing for Florida grapefruit in South Korea.

"Beginning in December and running through May each year from 2007 to 2013, we have 'layers' of marketing messages and support designed to increase

consumer awareness and interest in purchasing 'Fresh from Florida' grapefruit," Sleep says. "These include retail magazine ads, online events, store ads and even a television shopping network spot that sells full cases to consumers. We are also examining other products as well."

The success of the campaign has been nothing short of staggering. In 2006, the year before the department began its promotional campaign, South Korea purchased barely over 50,000 boxes of Florida grapefruit. Sales more than tripled in the first year of the campaign. And seven years into the campaign, Florida grapefruit sales in South Korea increased more than five fold.

"Our marketing group is constantly on the lookout for opportunities to expand

sales and improve awareness — sales equate to jobs in our state and also revenues to finance local, county and state governments as well as building a strong business environment," Sleep says.

Florida Fresh will keep finding new markets. The state is committed to agriculture, since it is a key piece of its economic future.

"Our ag industries are the foundation of economic success in this state," Sleep says. "Our farmers are mostly multi-generational, and they have a long-term commitment to our state, the future, the land they steward, and to the many people they serve with great produce — it's our pleasure to help operate with them."

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Through good times and bad times, wholesalers and shippers agree that loyalty and working together are the best ways to avoid conflict.

Wholesalers See Shippers As Their Most Important Relationship

For all of the potential conflicts over produce quality, product availability, direct competition and prompt payment, wholesalers and shippers manage to get along. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

Wholesalers and shippers have so many apparent conflicts of interest that it is a miracle of the produce distribution business that they are able to work together.

Shippers need wholesalers when there is too much supply, and the excess perishable product has to find a home in a hurry. Wholesalers, on the other hand, need shippers when there is not enough product, but they still have to serve their valued long-term customers.

The key to working this difference out harmoniously is that most of the players have worked, cooperated and negotiated with each other for years, decades, and in some cases, for generations.

"It's called relationships built over time — that's how it's done. It's an ongoing working relationship with the shippers," says Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA. "Shippers want a 52-week commitment from us, and we want a 52-week commitment from them."

These relationships have been tested by many tough economic years as shippers are sending more of their product directly to

retailers and foodservice, sometimes in direct competition with wholesalers. And wholesalers find themselves standing between shippers and the customers who are just a touch more reluctant in tough times to pay on time.

Experienced successful wholesalers, however, take these issues in stride because these potential conflicts are a regular feature of relationships with shippers that work.

"The economy hasn't really affected the relationship; eating is something people always do. You have shippers, wholesalers and customers, and they all need each other," says Stefanie Katzman, executive manager at Hunts Point Market wholesaler, S. Katzman Produce, Bronx, NY.

Good Times And Bad

Many shippers believe they only need wholesalers when there is oversupply and they need help finding homes for their produce fast, and at relatively good prices. But the heart of the relationship is that shippers must supply their wholesalers with product all the time, or the wholesalers won't be there when the shippers need them most.

"This has been the relationship since the

beginning of time. Every shipper needs wholesalers, and without shippers the wholesalers wouldn't be in business. Every one of our shippers uses us on a routine basis," Katzman says.

The more established wholesalers are confident that they can get product to service their customers, even when supply is short.

"We're getting sufficient supply of what we need," says Brian Hauge, president of Wholesale Produce Supply LLC, Minneapolis, MN. "When short supplies happen, we seem to be able to source product. Our relationships have become more solid because they are dependent on us. We have more solid relationships with a smaller number of quality shippers."

If wholesalers are confident they can get product when supply is tight, it is because they are confident in their own ability to come through for their shippers in a pinch when there is oversupply.

According to Alan Siger, chairman of Consumers Produce Company Inc., Pittsburgh, PA, "Not only are we able to move product when there is oversupply, sometimes we do so without even reducing their markets. Say a shipper usually has three to four loads of \$12 product. Then they have a couple extra



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loads. They can cut the price on everything or place a couple loads with trusted wholesalers across the country. We may return them close to what they usually get. We don't always hit home runs, but they have to have someone they can trust."

Loyalty is every bit as important as performance in building the relationships that will get a wholesaler product when supplies are tight. "We're an 80-year-old firm, and we're very loyal to our suppliers. If you stay loyal to your suppliers, they stay loyal to you," says

Mark Derby, director of procurement for General Produce Co., Sacramento, CA. "If you're constantly chasing the lowest price, you're going to get caught when the market is short, because they can't count on you."

That loyalty is built around providing shippers with steady business they can count on. "You can't call them one week and then not call them again for three weeks. The stuff doesn't stop growing," Derby says.

Wholesalers realize that finding ways to pick up the slack when too much product hits

the market is an essential part of their job. "One of the reasons for our existence is to act as a buffer between the shipper side and the consumer side. Because we're a valued asset to the shippers, they're going to remember us when the market is tight," Consumers Produce's Siger says.

Both wholesalers and shippers understand that the relationship has to be a two-way street. "My customers realize value when we're able to step up with product when others let them down," says Anton Marano Jr., sales executive at Anthony Marano Co., Chicago, IL. "It's part of the relationship that the shippers help us when we need it, and we help them when they need it."

Wholesalers know that the quality of their performance in times of over supply is what guarantees them product when they need it. "You can only hurt a shipper once," says Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., Bronx, NY. "We have good working relationships with shippers year round in all kinds of markets. Being there week in and week out and buying product in all markets will make a shipper feel good about selling you product when supply is tight. It's a give and take. If the wholesaler can't sell at a competitive price, the shipper is not going to reorder."

Keeping An Ear To The Ground

Relationships are not easy, but experienced players in the produce distribution business find ways to make it work. One of the ways to make it work is to maintain constant conversations between wholesalers and shippers on the state of the markets.

"You keep up daily discussions, and you keep posted on the markets. Everybody wants to get back as much as they can for the product. They're looking for you to move the product," Procacci's Maxwell says.

There are delicate times when that conversation involves the wholesaler honestly telling a shipper what they cannot do.

"We try to give them an honest answer as to what we can do in the market," says Mike Wise, president of Horton Fruit Company, Louisville, KY. "We want to be fair with our suppliers and develop relationships so they feel good about holding some product for us when supply is tight."

The ability to maintain this two-way relationship with shippers, despite the frequent apparent conflicts of interest, is what makes wholesaler who they are.

"It separates produce people from people who want to be produce people. I'd rather not say what separates the produce people because



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I don't want to agitate anyone," Marano Jr. says.

A little levity can help ease the challenge of this relationship. "I have to sell their product at the highest price and give them the best return. They have to give me the best quality and always say 'yes,'" jokes Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange, a wholesaler on the Hunts Point Market, Bronx, NY.

'Haven't I Seen You Somewhere Before?'

Nothing tests the relationship between wholesalers and shippers like discovering that

they are selling to the same retailer or foodservice company. This is most challenging because direct sales bring shippers and wholesalers into direct competition.

Wholesalers have their own ways of handling this situation. Some of them move on to new shippers rather than find themselves in price-cutting competition with their partners.

"I try not to use shippers or brokers who are selling to my customers," says Rob W. Strube III, president of Strube Celery & Vegetable Co., Chicago, IL. "I'm not going to battle a shipper

or broker for the same customers."

Other wholesalers try to convince their shippers to back away from the direct competition. "When we are selling to the same customers, we have a fairly open conversation that we're competing and they don't continue down that path," Fierman says. "We're very sensitive when like product shows up. Sometimes a third party will sell to our customers but I don't think it's intentional. We all realize that a good price in a good market means we're all making a fair return."

Some wholesalers try to avoid the conflict before it ever comes up. According to General's Derby, "The first thing I ask a shipper is, 'who else do you ship to in our area?' If they are going to our customers, I'm not as inclined to take them on."

Derby finds that shippers generally are looking for wholesalers to represent them exclusively in a particular geographic area. "The shippers prefer wholesalers to represent them rather than go through a broker," he says.

But there are a few wholesalers who are comfortable selling to the same customers as their shippers. They even see the silver lining in this direct competition, because it means that retailers are using the brands the wholesaler carries.

"It can be an advantage because it means they're buying the same label," Rubin Bros.' Rubin says. "Most large retailers buy a little short, and then look to fill in. My customers range from very small retailers to very large wholesaler/retailers, and some of them are buying from my shippers. It's the way the business is; there's no use fighting it."

This test is coming up more often these days as shippers try to shield themselves from uncertainty in this economy.

"Relationships with shippers are changing," says John Vena, president of John Vena Inc., Philadelphia, PA. "Most grower/shippers, and even many importers, are moving toward direct sales; therefore, we have to work more collaboratively with our shippers in order to keep our sales and marketing from interfering with one another's efforts."

Other wholesalers also noticed this important change in the relationship between shippers and retailers.

"Relationships with shippers are changing somewhat since contracting is becoming more prevalent between shippers, retail and foodservice chains. In foodservice 'it's who is the approved vendor' that dictates a relationship," says Bob Corey, CEO and chairman of Corey Bros. Inc., Charleston, WV.

In some cases, this increase in direct sales



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“My customers range from very small retailers to very large wholesaler/retailers, and some of them are buying from my shippers. It’s the way the business is; there’s no use fighting it.”

— Cary Rubin, Rubin Bros.

has wholesalers looking for new customers to replace those lost. “I have lost customers in the past two to three years, and much of it has to do with contract changes in foodservice representation from one coordinating group to another — where each group has their own ‘approved vendors.’ In the retail sector, changes in grocery suppliers, that also have their own produce, could cause a change in vendorship,” Corey says.

This increase in direct sales can also mean that shippers may have fewer products available to wholesalers. “Many of these guys have cut back or committed more of their business to regular customers, not to the open market,” Marano says.

Most wholesalers see the shift toward direct sales by shippers as a normal part of the business, as markets are regularly lost and won.

“Yes, we lost customers, but mostly due to

changes in their ownership or procurement philosophy,” Vena says. “However since we moved to the new Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market two years ago, we gained many new customers, and there is more opportunity for us.”

Quality And Safety

Wholesalers sometimes find themselves between shippers and retailers when it comes to the quality of the produce, including the safety of the produce.

“First and foremost, a shipper has to have a good food safety program and track record. We want to make sure that produce we bring into our facility is safe for our customers, and for consumers. We have a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) certified facility, and suppliers have to supply us with the appropriate paper work. We have delayed approval of vendors

until certain paperwork requirements are satisfied,” Horton’s Wise says.

Wise finds it prudent to make sure shippers meet his firm’s standards before developing a relationship. “We have not had any problems with food safety. We are selective about bringing in new vendors. We like to make sure suppliers have a good record of quality and service. If it’s a new supplier, we’ll make a few phone calls and do our homework,” Wise says.

Quality matters, but shippers also appreciate the efforts of wholesalers in taking on product that is less than cosmetically perfect.

“Generally speaking, the larger wholesalers get what they need. The key is working with shippers, not being technical about bruised strawberries or pithy broccoli,” Hauge of Wholesale Produce Supply says.

This flexibility to find homes for all sorts of produce can be an important part of what wholesalers bring to their relationship with shippers.

“In our regular business we can use all types, all sizes and all different quality and quantity. We can take what they have, while retailers have particular specifications,” Katzman of S. Katzman says.

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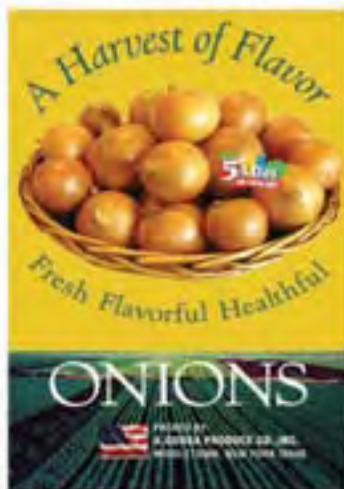
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made it even more important than ever that wholesalers offer every service possible to maintain their relationships with shippers.

"The economy has complicated my ability to hang onto customers only in the sense that customers are more price-driven. Relationship and service are still powerful, but less so with shrinking margins and higher costs of doing business," Corey says.

But even in the difficult economy, the basics of the wholesaler-shipper relationship are the same. "The core principles of freshness, appearance, taste and yield, as well as variety and competitive pricing, timely service, and representation, drive this business," Corey adds. "The emphasis is on doing all of this more consistently and better than your compe-

tion — or better than you were doing before. It is always important to work closely with shippers, especially today with volatile supply, demand and availability issues.

Friends After All

For all of the potential conflicts over produce quality, product availability, direct competition and prompt payment, wholesalers and shippers manage to get along.

"I've been here for 10 years, and we haven't had any relationships fall apart for reasons of animosity. If there is a quality situation that we're concerned about, we may have to look elsewhere for that day, week or month," Horton's Wise says.

The ability to get along starts with the

GET ME TO THE BANK ON TIME

Wholesalers understand that quick payment to their shippers is an indispensable part of being able to source product when it is in tight supply.

"It all comes down to your rating in the Blue Book," says Brian Hauge, president of Wholesale Produce Supply Co., Minneapolis, MN. "If you're not paying your bills on time, you're going to have problems getting product."

Even a few days quicker in payment may give a wholesaler an edge on the competition in getting product when supply is tight.

"We try to pay our suppliers quickly. When push comes to shove, we hope it's an advantage that we try to get our bills paid within 10 days, and somebody else might take 20 days," says Mike Wise, president of Horton Fruit Company, Louisville, KY.

When it comes to getting paid in a timely manner, however, the wholesaler sits between buyers and shippers, a difficult position that became even more difficult with the U.S. economy's turmoil in the past five years.

Many wholesalers responded to this challenge by becoming more persistent in their collection activities.

According to John Vena, president of John Vena Inc., Philadelphia, PA, it is becoming more and more difficult to keep certain customers current. "We have always had quite conservative policies regarding credit, and we have continued to enforce those. It is very difficult to

turn a customer away for credit issues, especially in these times," Vena says.

Other wholesalers also report that their terms of credit have not changed, but their attempts to enforce those terms have become more persistent. "Times are difficult for all operators," says Bob Corey, CEO and chairman of Corey Bros. Inc., Charleston, WV. "A higher emphasis on good communication with accounts payable departments helps maintain timely payments. We have not had changes in our terms of credit, but we have become more firm in collecting what was agreed upon."

Some wholesalers have no option but to stop selling to customers who make them wait for payment. According to Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange, Bronx, NY, "We made a conscious decision, as a company, five years ago about our receivables. Since we pay in a 10- to 21-day window, if a customer does not pay within 30 days, with an outside of 45 days, we'd just as soon not sell to them. This is a perishable product, and we're not a bank."

Even wholesalers with excellent payment records find the standards of quick payment are not what they used to be. "Everybody is low on money, and payment is difficult especially in foodservice," says Rob Strube, president of Strube Celery & Vegetable Co., Chicago, IL. "We're pretty well on top of it. We're not in the same three- to five-day pay period we were 25 years ago, but I don't think anybody else is either."

Side Note

pb



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Most occurrences of SCA in youth occur in public places. The increased availability of publicly accessible automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in schools and school-sponsored athletic events will dramatically increase the probability that youth and adults alike will survive a sudden cardiac arrest. Knowing and properly executing the critically time-urgent links of the Cardiac Chain-of-Survival can help save the life of someone in SCA.

In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all New York public schools. To date 75 lives have been saved as a direct result of this law in New York public schools. Each time a vibrant, seemingly healthy child suffers a Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA), the Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation mission of protecting youth from SCA and preventable Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) becomes even more critical. We know it happens and we need to collectively assure others realize it by sharing our Mission and Vision.

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“We enjoy our relationships with our shippers They know we’re out here battling for them.”

— Joel Fierman, Fierman Produce Exchange

wholesaler working to understand the needs of their shippers. “It is very important to understand the needs and the goals of your shippers, especially for your marketing area,” Vena says. “We work hard to help our suppliers achieve the market penetration they need in our area. The economy complicates everything, and we have to continue to maintain value for our customers, or they will drift away.”

This means that wholesaling is, ultimately, a service business.

“The most important thing we can offer our customers is service, and that starts with answering the phone and reaching out to buyers. Therefore we have been adding more people to our customer service and sales staff so we can take our time with each customer,” Vena says.

Some wholesalers use the term “customer” to designate the quality of service they offer to their shippers.

“We have the customers we sell to, and we have the customers we sell for. You have to have someone to sell to, but you also have to have suppliers,” Siger of Consumers Produce says.

Other wholesalers use the term “partner” to describe their shipper customers.

“I try to treat my relationships with shippers as partnerships. It is a cherished relationship. If shippers can’t make money, they’re not going to send me product,” Rubin Bros.’ Rubin says.

The relationships between wholesalers and shippers make it possible to survive potential conflicts, and at times to even enjoy surviving them.

“We enjoy our relationships with our shippers and I think they enjoy us. They know we’re out here battling for them,” Fierman Produce Exchange’s Fierman says.

“A lot of my relationships with shippers are friendships,” Strube of Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. says. “Good personal relationships are essential. Build a trust factor, and if there are issues, you are not going to exaggerate too much!”

“I’m dealing with people my father dealt with,” Siger says, “and he passed away in 1978. If you’ve been here 60 years with a good reputation that certainly helps.”

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Exports of Mexico's Top 10 produce items increased by 11.7 percent over the past five years from 4.01 billion pounds in 2008 to 4.48 billion pounds in 2013.

West Mexico Thrives On Change And Challenges

Building on a solid past, the West Mexico produce industry uses innovation and technology to prepare for the future. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

The present and future looks strong for West Mexico produce as growers and their distributors continue to meet increasing demands and challenges. According to USDA statistics as reported by the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), exports of Mexico's Top 10 produce items increased by 11.7 percent over the past five years from 4.01 billion pounds in 2008 to 4.48 billion pounds in 2013.

"Buyers will discover that the diversity of products and consistency in supplies makes working with U.S. importers of West Mexico produce beneficial for any business," says Allison Moore, director of legislative and regulatory affairs for the FPAA in Nogales, AZ. "West Mexico has been growing and exporting fresh fruits and vegetables for the U.S. and Canadian markets for over 100 years. The growth and sophistication of the West Mexico deal has evolved with the buying community to fill the needs customers' demands."

The West Mexico industry has harnessed popular trends. "Trade is increasing as the demand for produce is increasing," says Alicia Martin, CEO of Wilson Produce LLC in

Nogales, AZ. "Consumers are more open to trying different varieties of produce, and Mexico has really been able to capture this demand and provide great products."

"Mexican agriculture has grown in accordance with the needs of the U.S. and Canadian customers we cater to," says Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing Inc. in Nogales, AZ. "Our protected agriculture growing practices provided a steady volume of quality produce to promote for retail, foodservice, and wholesale customers."

Change and challenge have not stood in the way of progress for the West Mexico industry or its U.S. counterparts. "We know our industry is always in a state of constant change, but that's the nature of our business," says Chamberlain. "Our farming partners, as well as our distributors, are poised to handle the challenges that come our way this season and in the years to come. The new Tomato Suspension Agreement, the Food Safety Modernization Act rules, and climate changes are just a few of our challenges. The implementation of a new health care system, along with looming domestic labor, and water shortages will also shape a new and dynamic produce environment."

The West Mexico industry points to the opportunities created by change. "Recently there has been an increase in production areas in various parts of Mexico and development of new entry ports in the United States," shares Martin. "This means Mexican growers are able to provide more produce from more areas during longer periods of the year. The new entry ports in the United States allow for improved trade and distribution. Advancement in transportation allows buyers to receive fresher produce with a shorter shipping time. All of these positive changes eventually end up benefiting consumers."

The Move Inside

Perhaps no change in West Mexico has been as significant over the past decade than the move to protected agriculture. "In 2010 AMHPAC's growers reported a little over 16,000 acres (6,500 hectares)," reports Alfredo Diaz Belmonte, CEO of the Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. "In 2013, AMHPAC's member growers represent a surface of over 21,000 acres (8,500+ hectares) of greenhouses and shadehouses nationwide

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and have been growing at an average of 10 percent annually.”

“We’ve seen a move toward more and more shadehouse production, longer shipping seasons, and more diverse offering of products,” agrees Chris Ciruli, Chief Operating Officer of Ciruli Brothers, LLC in Tubac, AZ.

“Protected agriculture is definitely increasing,” says John McDaniel, sales and operation manager from the L&M Companies office in Nogales, AZ. “Our growers saw the advantage of protected agriculture even

more so last season due to weather and pest conditions.”

West Mexico industry statistics reflect the tendency to change from open field to more greenhouse production. “By 2011, greenhouse tomatoes surpassed open field production in exports to the U.S. with 59 percent of all exports reported as greenhouse environment production,” reports Diaz Belmonte. “In 2013 the ratio between greenhouse and open field production saw a rather large change, with 62 percent of all exported tomatoes up to July 2013 being

reported as greenhouse grown.”

“In 2011, the vast majority of cucumber exports was reported as open-field grown with only 9 percent of all exports to the U.S. reported as greenhouse environment production,” continues Diaz Belmonte. “In 2012, not only did cucumber exports grow by 11 percent, but they also presented a change toward greenhouse production with 18 percent of all cucumber exports reported as greenhouse grown. By 2013 the same trend presented a 4.2 percent increase in exports with 35 percent of those exports reported as greenhouse produce.”

“The majority of bell pepper exports in 2011 was reported as open-field grown, and only 14 percent of exports to the U.S. reported as greenhouse environment production,” adds Diaz Belmonte. “In 2012, not only did bell pepper exports grow by 27.2 percent, but 25 percent of all cucumber exports were reported as greenhouse grown. In 2013, the trend decreased to 0.3 percent increase in exports — 22 percent of those exports were reported as greenhouse produce.”

Protected agriculture is found throughout Mexico. AMHPAC differentiates five major growing zones in Mexico: Northwest, where 58 percent of AMHPAC’s protected surface is located; West with 23 percent; Northeast, Center and South with the remaining 19 percent. “Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Sonora are the northwestern states that dominate the West Mexico borders,” says Diaz Belmonte. “Texas crossings are mostly supplied from the northeastern and western states.”

Product Expansion

West Mexico’s product mix has traditionally focused on major volume crops. According to USDA statistics, the Top 10 exported items include tomatoes, watermelon, cucumber, bell pepper, squash, grapes, mangos, honeydews, hot peppers and eggplant. In 2013, AMHPAC’s reported production under protected structures consisted of about 60 percent in tomatoes, 20 percent in cucumbers, 17 percent in bell peppers and the remaining 3 percent dedicated mostly to eggplants and specialty peppers.

The quality, volume and innovation in these and other categories strengthened West Mexico’s business. “West Mexico has become a long-term, multi-season source for a large choice of vegetables and fruits,” says Alejandro Canelos, director of Apache Produce Imports, LLC in Nogales, AZ. “The quality of the supply is backed by companies that have been in this business for a long time.”

Continues on page 126



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JUST THE STATS

A comparison of volume and movement for three major products in U.S./West Mexico trade.

TOMATOES

Tomato exports from Mexico to the U.S. in 2011 totaled 2.5 billion pounds. In 2012, they increased by 3.6 percent to 2.6 billion pounds. In 2013 (January to July), tomato exports totaled 1.8 billion pounds, a growth of 4.5 percent over the same period in 2011 and 1.4 percent compared to the same period in 2012.

A Comparison of Crossings:

Tomato exports through Nogales (AZ):

- 2011 = 1.1 billion pounds
- 2012 = 1.2 billion pounds (increase of 7.4 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 978 million pounds. A growth of 1.5 percent over 2011, and a decrease of 3.9 percent compared to 2012.
- Nogales went from 43.6 percent of all tomato exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 45.4 percent in 2012.

Tomato exports through Otay Mesa (CA):

- 2011 = 525 million pounds
- 2012 = 466 million pounds (decrease of 12.6 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 190 million pounds. A decrease of 19.3 percent compared to the same period in 2011 and of 7.3 percent compared to the same period in 2012.
- Otay Mesa went from 20.9 percent of all tomato exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 17.9 percent in 2012.

Tomatoes exports through Texas borders:

- 2011 = 887 million pounds
- 2012 = 991 million pounds (increase of 10.4 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 606 million pounds. An increase of 16.7 percent compared to the same period in 2011, and of 6.1 percent compared to the same period in 2012.
- Texas borders went from 35.4 percent of all tomato exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 38.1 percent in 2012.

CUCUMBERS

Cucumber exports from Mexico to the U.S. in 2011 totaled 966 million pounds. In 2012 they increased by 11 percent to 1.1 billion pounds. In 2013, from January to July, cucumber exports totaled 730 million pounds, an increase of 14.7 percent compared to the same period in 2011, and 4.2 percent over the same period in 2012.

A Comparison of Crossings:

Cucumber exports through Nogales (AZ):

- 2011 = 527 million pounds
- 2012 = 628 million pounds (increase of 16 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 435 million pounds. An increase of 19.9 percent compared to the same period in 2011 and of 6.4 percent over the same period in 2012.
- Nogales went from 54.6 percent of all cucumber exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 57.9 percent in 2012.

Cucumber exports through Otay Mesa (CA):

- 2011 = 178 million pounds
- 2012 = 198 million pounds (increase of 10 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 99.7 million pounds. An increase of 5.8 percent compared to the same period in 2011, and a decrease of 7.6 percent compared to the same period in 2012.
- Otay Mesa went from 18.4 percent of all cucumber exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 18.2 percent in 2012.

Cucumber exports through Texas borders:

- 2011 = 263 million pounds
- 2012 = 270 million pounds (increase of 2.3 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 183 million pounds. An increase of 0.1 percent compared to the same period in 2011, and a decrease of 8.8 percent compared to the same period in 2012.
- Texas borders went from 27.3 percent of all cucumber exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 24.9 percent in 2012.

BELL PEPPERS

Bell pepper exports from Mexico to the U.S. in 2011 totaled 571 million pounds. In 2012 they increased by 27.2 percent to 785 million pounds. In 2013, from January to July, bell pepper exports totaled 562 million pounds, an increase of 22.2 percent over the same period in 2011 and 0.3 percent over the same period in 2012.

A Comparison of Crossings:

Bell Pepper exports through Nogales (AZ):

- 2011 = 422 million pounds
- 2012 = 540 million pounds (increase of 21.8 percent).
- 2013 (January to July) = 418 million pounds. An increase of 16.4 percent compared to the same period in 2011, and a decrease of 2.2 percent compared to the same period in 2012.
- Nogales went from 74 percent of all bell pepper exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 68.9 percent in 2012.

Bell pepper exports through Otay Mesa (CA):

- 2011 = 42 million pounds
- 2012 = 50 million pounds (increase of 15.1 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 23.8 million pounds. A decrease of 3.3 percent compared to the same period in 2011 and of 30.4 percent compared to the same period in 2012.
- Otay Mesa went from 7.4 percent of all bell pepper exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 6.3 percent in 2012.

Bell pepper exports through Texas borders:

- 2011 = 141 million pounds
- 2012 = 192 million pounds (increase of 26.4 percent)
- 2013 (January to July) = 120 million pounds. An increase of 40.9 percent over the same period in 2011, and of 15.3 percent over the same period in 2012.
- Texas borders went from 24.8 percent of all bell pepper exports to the U.S. in 2011 to 24.5 percent in 2012.

Source: Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service

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IMPROVED LOGISTICS

The Mariposa Port of Entry in Nogales significantly expanded to more than double its previous capacity. “It has been described as the flagship port of entry for the entire United States,” explains Allison Moore, director of legislative and regulatory affairs for the FPAA in Nogales, AZ. “With eight commercial processing lanes, expanded dock spaces for secondary inspections, and the latest in inspection technology, Nogales is the largest reconfiguration project undertaken in the past several years.”

“The Nogales Mariposa Port of Entry reconfiguration will be complete in early 2014,” adds Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing Inc. in Nogales, AZ. “At the completion of this project, we will have the country’s most modern and most efficient port of entry. This port will have the capacity to process between 4,000 and 5,000 commercial trucks a day in an efficient and timely manner. The new port will also have quick and easy access to our produce industrial parks within the Nogales city limits as well as to Rio Rico.”

“The completed Mariposa port of entry will allow us to increase the volume of crossings to three to four times its current capacity going forward, on all different types of produce,” says Chris Ciruli, Chief Operating Officer of Ciruli

Brothers, LLC in Tubac, AZ.

Collaboration from private and public sector aims for even better produce handling and trade facilitation. “The industry and the governments of the U.S. and Mexico are always looking to improve processes to make border crossings more efficient while allowing government agencies to effectively do their job,” says Moore. “Improvements being completed on the Mexican side of the border will also continue to enhance the crossing process. In addition, technology continues to better facilitate the movement of goods and people.”

Additional services like South-focused trade and consolidation present opportunity. “Remember, not all produce flows north,” states Chamberlain. “Many U.S.-based produce distributors are realizing the benefits of selling produce to Mexican chain stores and wholesalers as well.”

“Companies in Nogales have an advantage over other counterparts when it comes to picking up and consolidating product precisely because there is a higher concentration of distribution centers in a smaller area,” reports Ciruli. “Every year we see more customers ask for consolidated service so their drivers do not need to conduct multiple pickups.” **pb**

Continued from page 122

“At L&M, we are concentrating on helping our growers find varieties to increase shelf life while maintaining great taste,” says McDaniel. “We are working to expand our growing regions on core items to minimize any gaps in supply.”

The West Mexico industry has also responded to market demand for additional variety. “In recent years, many new products were introduced to our customers,” says J-C’s Chamberlain. “Mini bells, mini cucumbers, mini watermelons, and a myriad of new chili varieties as well as new tomato varieties are now being distributed through many Nogales distributors. Dozens of commodities are also being offered as organic.”

“West Mexico developed many unique varieties as well as presentations to keep retail shelves interesting and profitable,” agrees Canelos. “The tomato category is an obvious example of the innovation and excellence the West Mexico industry has to offer. Retail sales increase in proportion to the variety offered in tomatoes. Mexico developed reliable quality production of a wide variety of tomatoes. Another example is how production of seedless cucumbers over the past several years increased. There is still great opportunity here.”

New trends influence the product mix. FPAA’s Moore says, “To a large extent, new products are driven by trends and changes in consumer eating habits. They access, what the

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new trends are in consumer eating habits, and the new flavors being used in restaurant menus and on cooking shows.”

“Growers are shipping increased amounts of specialty items, which are quickly becoming more mainstream items,” concurs Ciruli of Ciruli Brothers. “Buyers are purchasing more items, trying to become more ethnic-based and catering to a wider diversity of clientele. This means buyers have to buy more items like hot peppers or specialty eggplants, and the change allows us as shippers to consolidate a better mix of product for buyers.”

The diverse West Mexico production region means expansion in seasonality as well. “Mexico has a naturally great climate for growing a large variety of produce nearly year-round,” says Wilson’s Martin. “As different growing practices are adopted, there will be expanded availability.”

“For the past several years, there have been year-round crossings of fresh produce both through the Nogales and Texas ports,” says Ciruli. “The commodities vary during the year and include avocados, limes, tomatoes, squash, mangos, and different types of peppers.”

“The different growing regions shipping through both Nogales and Texas will continue to complement each other due to the diver-

sity of growing areas and climates,” adds FPAA’s Moore. “Including fresh produce crossing through California and Mexico, continues to offer diverse products year round, filling strong demand in the winter months and adding increased variety in the summer — especially with products like mangos and table grapes filling the void in availability from other regions.”

Future Direction

The West Mexico industry looks to continue product innovation in the future. “Moving forward, we’re going to see a continued move to balance appearance, shelf-life and flavor,” explains Apache’s Canelos. “Customers are increasingly more demanding with quality and flavor and stores need to not just have the product available but make sure it tastes good. We need to continue improving the balance of both.

“West Mexico, like much of the rest of the country, will continue to take advantage of regional microclimates and growing technologies, allowing growers to extend their season on the front and back end, mitigate any potential isolated weather issues, and also grow great produce with consistency in quality and

supply,” adds Moore.

“Buyers should expect to see better availability and quality as the protected ag investment continues over the next five to 10 years,” says L&M’s McDaniel. “Through the leadership of the FPAA, the port of Nogales has seen, and will continue to see, more expansion and streamlining of its operations [see “Improved Logistics” side note on page 126]. This will increase the availability and reliability of the West Mexico production. More production will also cross in Texas as the Mexican infrastructure improves and warehouse availability continues to expand in Texas.”

Companies handling West Mexican product continue to strengthen their business and add value. “While there is a natural fluctuation to the industry each year, we don’t anticipate a lot of change in the number of companies operating here in the near future,” reports Moore. “What is more prevalent is how companies diversify their own internal operations to match the business climate, including adding products to their line and expanding services.”

“I’m starting my 26th season with our business, and my confidence is based on the grower and customer relationships we cultivated since 1971,” says J-C’s Chamberlain. **pb**

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Red River Valley Retail Promotions Are On The Table This Season

Contrary to industry requests, the extent of available marketing opportunities will come after a later-than-usual harvest. **BY BILL MARTIN**

There are plenty of opinions on how large the red potato crop will flourish this season from the rich black loamy soil of the Red River Valley, but there seems to be consensus that retail promotional opportunities will be available to chain stores. One crop estimate has the fresh potato deal being down over 20 percent, but some shippers see the tonnage being near normal. Due to one of the craziest growing seasons to date — with harvesting behind schedule — most agree that

no one is really going to know production totals until the crop is harvested and in storage.

For example, *Potato Bytes*, the online publication of the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA) in East Grand Forks, MN, reported in its September 15 edition, potatoes at the “vines killed” stage were 48 percent — well behind 83 percent last year and the 68 percent average. It is about three weeks from the time vines are killed until the potatoes are dug out of the ground.

The USDA predicts North Dakota’s potato

crop to be 19.1 million hundredweight — 6.1 million fewer cwt. than last year, or a drop of 24.2 percent. *Potato Bytes* observed, “because of the high percentage of dry land farming in North Dakota, weather can create big swings in potato production from year to year. A cold wet spring followed by drought conditions in July and August will take the top off dry land yields this fall.

Although rains to the Valley came later in the season than many would have preferred, a big plus this year is “we know the digging



Top Row (L-R): Greg Hall, J.G. Hall; Steve Johnson, NoKota Packers; Mike Rerick, NoKota Packers; Ron Gjelsness, NoKota Packers; Leah Brakke, Black Gold Farms; Steve Tweten, Nokota Packers.

Middle Row (L-R): Andy Moquist, Krissy Robinson, Dave Moquist, O.C. Schulz & Sons; Randy Boushey of A & L Potato Co. Inc. and Greg Hoverson of Hoverson; Ted Kreis, Diane Peycke, Chuck Gunnerson, Northern Plains Potato Growers Association.

Bottom Row (L-R): Paul Dolan, Jim LeQuire, Greg Holtman, Steve Grod, Associated Potato Growers; Susie Thompson Phd., North Dakota State University; Mary Kerian, James Kerian, Paul Overby, Kerian Machines.

conditions are much better than last year," observes Ted Kreis, director of marketing and communications for the NPPGA.

Ironically, the Minnesota portion of the Red River Valley to the east had a more normal growing season, and harvest is nearly on schedule with the potato crop estimated to be down only 3.7 percent.

Steve Tweten, president of NoKota Packers Inc. of Buxton, ND, notes, "there have been a lot of variations this year in the red potato deal, starting with the region's first offerings out of the Big Lake and Long Prairie areas of Minnesota." The season launched at "historic" pricing levels, which stifled consumer demand, before the market crashed. However, Tweten expresses optimism, "the fresh market is settling to where demand will match supply."

"When the market went too high it killed retail promotions, but I see opportunities for promotions this season," Tweten states.

Jason Anderson, Produce director for Affiliated Foods Midwest in Norfolk, NE, which supplies over 800 stores in a 16-state area, is aware there was too much rain in the Valley last spring—causing some growers to replant. He notes that volume may be "a little less" this season.

"The product seems to be the standard [for quality], and we are going to commit to that this year as well," Anderson says.

Paul Dolan, general manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc. in Grand Forks, ND, remains confident of retail promotion opportunities this season, "if we get the crop and quality." He agrees more will be known as the harvest winds down in late October.

Dave Moquist, president of O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc. of Crystal, ND, is telling customers there will be good supplies for the start of the season and "everything we have dug has been good." He sees the Valley having more of an average crop this season, but acknowledges more will be known as the harvest progresses.

Randy Boushey, co-owner of A & L Potato Co. Inc. in East Grand Forks, MN, says his operation washed the first potatoes that were grown in Big Lake, MN, in the Valley on August 6. "The quality and color was good," he notes.

"There should be opportunities for some retail promotions," Boushey says.

Carl Hoverson, a principal in Hoverson Farms of Larimore, ND, is testing some new varieties of red potatoes he has under irrigation, and he agrees there should be enough volume for retailers to promote.

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Buying Trends

Imagine barely having your crop planted in the ground and a buyer wants a price quote on potatoes for the entire season. This year in the Red River Valley is a good example of how difficult this may be. Even three months later as harvest approaches many growers still are wondering what kind of crop they will have, making it difficult to place a value on their potatoes. Greg Hall, a principal in J.G. Hall and Sons of Hoople, ND says, "Two weeks ago, the price was \$50 cwt; today it is \$15. I haven't done seasonal pricing yet. Time will tell," Hall says.

Mike Rerick, vice president of sales and marketing with NoKota Packers, agrees, "When the price of potatoes is \$50 cwt, you can't promote them. Retailers to look elsewhere for promotions on whites and yellows [potatoes] — or they don't look at all. If a 10-pound bag of potatoes is \$10, there are lots of other things the consumer can buy with that."

NoKota salesman, Steve Johnson, says, "it was totally different a year ago, at the beginning of the season, when red potato prices out of Minnesota in July were more in line with what retailers were wanting."

Boushey at A & L Potato notes, "Consumers

have more choices than ever when it comes to potatoes, whether it is fingerlings, reds, blues, purple, or russet potatoes, not to mention A-size, B-size, creamers, etc. This creates some pressure on pricing and volume."

At Associated Potato Growers, Dolan believes this all has an effect on buying decisions and points to Wal-Mart, which has mostly replaced direct buying of potatoes in favor of using brokers. He thinks this is due to the huge chain wanting more category management.

Dolan also sees more partnerships by large buying organizations, while smaller operations are teaming with larger companies. These trends, in some cases, are good but in others may not be.

"You tend to lose the personal contacts with the larger organizations. However, the ones who are doing it right can see results in sales of reds and russets for their customers," Dolan notes. The manager of the Valley's largest red potato shipping operation also points to buying trends being affected as more production areas, including Idaho, are growing more red potatoes and making the category more competitive.

"At some point, I think people like the service and a lot of the time you don't get that



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WHAT'S NEW IN RED RIVER VALLEY

BLACK GOLD FARMS: Leah Brakke, Black Gold Farms' marketing specialist, says the company partnered with McCormick & Company to introduce red potatoes in clamshell packs with a handle. Three seasoning blends are available: roasted Italian herbs, roasted onion and garlic, and roasted garlic and rosemary.

"Black Gold entered the Red River Valley fresh potato deal three years ago, and this is the first season for the operation to wash the potatoes in the Valley instead of hauling the potatoes (and dirt) to its Southeastern Missouri wash plant," Brakke says. She also notes that the company introduced potatoes in tote bags this season.

HOVERSON FARMS: The company was absent from the fresh red potato deal, but came back in a small way a year ago. It is now expanding its presence this season. Principal Carl Hoverson says, "I'm looking for new red potato varieties that will do well under irrigation. Some of the new varieties set pretty and do well under irrigation. We won't have a big presence [with fresh potatoes]; we're just experimenting with some of these varieties. I'm not trying to compete with companies doing dry land farming for years.

In 1981 Carl Hoverson had 400 acres of white potatoes and now has 5,100 acres of potatoes on 20,000 acres of land in 2011, according to the firm's website. This season, Hoverson estimates he will have a little over 50,000 cwt of irrigated red potatoes for the fresh market, but believes most of his production will always be with potatoes for processing.

KERIAN MACHINES INC.: The family-owned operation now builds sizers for two dozen fresh produce items ranging from blueberries to cantaloupe, to garlic, to cherries, to apples. President/Owner James Kerian says business is increasing for mushroom and persimmon sizing machines. "We did [build] lots of Brussels sprout machines in early summer, mostly for customers in California," Kerian says. "We have had a good year with an increase in customers looking for stainless steel systems."

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service," Dolan states.

Moquist at O.C. Schulz points out retail produce buyers in the past reacted quicker to commodity markets. "Now these buyers have more long-term pricing," says Moquist, whose primary customers are repackers and wholesalers, although there is some retail business.

"It seems all of the retailers are looking for pricing predictions — perhaps six to eight weeks. As growers, it's hard to do this because things can change so much. If we give an average crop price and it turns out to be a

short crop, we need the [higher] market to cover the lost product," Moquist says.

Moquist explains that russet potatoes have year-around supplies, making it easier for long term pricing. However, it is difficult with red potatoes being more of a specialty crop.

It was a year ago the NPPGA introduced a new logo for shippers to use in presenting a more unified brand identity for Valley red potatoes.

Kreis says, "We're working to get the new logo integrated into packaging. This will take

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RETAILERS ARE EXCITED ABOUT RED POTATO SALES

BY BILL MARTIN

During the past decade, the competition among red potato-producing areas around the country has increased, but Red River Valley's dry-land produced red potatoes continue to be a favorite for many retailers, particularly in the Midwest.

Jason Anderson is produce director for Affiliated Foods Midwest, based in Norfolk, NE. It supplies over 800 stores in a 16-state Midwestern region, and when it comes to red potatoes, the wholesale grocer provides selection.

"Due to the proximity of Minnesota and North Dakota, when in season — from a freight standpoint — we really prefer to pull potatoes from those areas," says Anderson. "You save lots that way and can utilize your backhaul (return load) capabilities."

Beyond the transportation advantages, Anderson adds, "We just really enjoy the color and clarity of the product. They hit the quality market we are looking for."

When it comes to red potatoes, Anderson says Affiliated Foods prefers the full, dark, red, vibrant color that is associated with red potatoes produced in the Red River Valley. Red potatoes in some Southern regions, and those that are more regional, have more of a pink color with a skin set "that isn't all there." In other words, the skin may be a little thin and more subject to scarring.

Don Kudrle is produce manager of Country Market in Hudson, WI. He is proud of the fact his store has volume sales that are comparable to club stores in the area.

Spending the past 26 years in produce, and all with the Hudson County Market, Kudrle notes the importance of

red potatoes in the category. Besides taking advantage of the color breaks that red potatoes offer with russets and yellow potatoes, his 71,000-square-foot store also provides adequate shelf space to reds — even though they are typically outsold by russets two-to-one.

"The [red potatoes] are right there next to the five-pound bag russets and receive the same amount of facing," says Kudrle. "We sell red potatoes in five-pound bags and the B-size reds in bulk."

The primary supplier to the Hudson Country Market is Kruger's Inc. of Minneapolis, a wholesale distributor. Kudrle also sources red petite and the small red steamers from Kruger's.

At Affiliated Foods, Anderson says red potatoes fit in with a normal rotation when it comes to promotions. "Red potatoes fit a nice niche in the areas we serve," says Anderson.

A good example of this is Hugo's Family Marketplace.

Rick Hogan is produce manager (celebrating 40 years with the independent chain in December) of Hugo's nine supermarkets in Grand Forks, ND, where reds account for 90 percent of the potato category sales.

"I work closely with my associates, and if we don't all have the same vision, it can be tough," Hogan says. "I encourage our associates to take pride in their produce departments as if it were their homes. They do a good job."

While part of Hugo's success with red



potatoes is its location in the heart of the Red River Valley production area, there are other factors that can hurt red potato sales. Anderson at Affiliated Foods points to a suffering economy for the past four or five years, combined with some years where excessive production of potatoes (particularly russets) delivers adverse effects on sales.

Anderson also says that depressed potato markets can have a greater effect on red potatoes sales since reds tend to be priced higher than russets.

Kudrle agrees, "I try to go with the same price with russets and reds on five-pound bags, but it doesn't always work out that way."

Anderson adds, "A big factor that helps the overall retail price of reds is the trend toward smaller consumer packs. Those consumer bags sell more, whether you are going from a 10-pound to a five-pound, or a five-pound to a three-pound bag." He also commends potato marketers for doing such a good job making lots of potato varieties available, while at the same time being sensitive to the shelf price.

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place over time as bag orders are updated and the old inventory is exhausted."

Crop Outlook

The Spokely family has been farming for 142 years. Today they are known for seed potatoes and table stock for the red potato market. Lonnie Spokely, owner of Spokely Farms of Nielsville, MN, speaks with confidence about the Red River Valley potato market this season.

"The [Valley] crop will be okay," Spokely

says. "We're optimistic the price will strengthen some more. Idaho is down, and our potatoes look pretty nice."

Rick Hogan oversees the produce departments in Hugo's Family Marketplace's nine Grand Forks, ND, supermarkets. After nearly four decades of working in retail produce, he has seen it all and knows every growing season in the Valley presents challenges of some kind. His primary concern is that some areas of the Valley have not had as much rain as others, and

he believes "size will suffer" in the overall crop this season.

Kreis agrees, but is encouraged by late season rains loosening the soil for harvest. Yet, predicting everything from the availability of particular sizes of potatoes to the total Valley volume is difficult, even in late September.

If the Red River Valley trade agrees on one thing this season, it is that the total crop really will not be known until everything is under cover — in storage.

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Companion products are a potent contributor to department sales, ringing up at 10.1 percent of produce dollars during the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013.

Three Steps To Increasing The Produce Ring With Tie-Ins

Cross-merchandising, shippers, companion displays — whichever promotional method you choose — these three relevant tactics pertain to all categories in Produce. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

Some retail chains require a “clean” look in their produce department. Displays are created to emulate lush fields of yellows, reds and greens unpunctuated by non-produce items. Others get carried away with cross-merchandising to the point where companion products make the department look like a flea market. Then, there are those retailers who figured out that there is a profitable way to merchandise produce and tie-in products and it straddles these two extremes.

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral and seafood for Kings Food Markets, a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, says, “To make cross-merchandising work, and to take it to the next level, requires a plan.”

This type of plan is something retailers need to create or update. Companion products are a potent contributor to department sales, ringing up at 10.1 percent of produce dollars during the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based fresh food consulting firm.

STEP ONE: Choose Companion Products Wisely

Cross-departmental merchandising got its start in the grocery department. Tremendous sales increases occurred when peanut butter and jelly were displayed on adjacent end caps and pasta and tomato sauce in the same aisle. These concepts work because each product complements the other and make it more convenient for customers to shop.

Jim McMath, regional sales manager for the Los Angeles, CA-headquartered Sugar Food Corporation, makers of Fresh Gourmet-brand salad toppings, underscores the consumer-centric handiness factor. “In their increasingly hectic lives, consumers appreciate being able to purchase all their salad components in one place, saving them time and energy.”

Salad ingredients as well as bakery items, seasonings, vegetarian foods, cheese, and a host of other products, can be lucratively merchandised in the produce department. The best choices are those that can’t be eaten or enjoyed on their own; they need fruits or vegetables, or those that have a purposeful tie-in theme with

fresh produce.

Salad Components. Dressings, along with glazes, marinades and sauces, as well as other produce (including croutons, salad toppers and salad kits) represented 16.7 percent of the non-produce category for the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group.

Greg Samarge, senior brand manager at Ventura Foods, LLC, in Brea, CA, makers of Marie’s brand salad dressing, explains, “our dressings are merchandised in Produce because they are fresh and require refrigeration. We have over 40 flavors. Retailers will carry from a handful to a dozen or more. Shelf-stable dressings are sold in grocery.”

Salad toppings is how Los Angeles, CA-based Paramount Farms International markets its Wonderful Almond Accents, a line of 3.5-ounce packets of almonds in six flavors: Honey Roasted with Cranberries, Sweet Roasted with Pomegranites, Oven Roasted, Honey Roasted, Oven Roasted No Salt, and Sea Salt & Cracked Pepper. “We know our consumers are health-oriented and concerned with weight

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management,” says Marc Seguin, vice president of marketing, “so the produce department provides the perfect platform to reach these health-minded shoppers.”

Balance in flavor profiles also drives product decisions at Seattle-based Sahale Snacks. The company pairs pomegranate arils with pistachios, almonds, cherries, lemon and black pepper to provide “an irresistible balance” and an easy way to open a package and provide the memorable feeling chefs and home consumers want in their salads.

The company’s Sahale Crunchers line continues the good feelings with blends like roasted sliced almonds with dried cranberries, sesame seeds, vanilla bean and an orange blossom honey glaze. An even sweeter direction is taken with an almond/dried cherry/apple/maple/cinnamon blend, while an earthier savory blend is offered in Parmesan Cheese + Herbs with sun-dried tomatoes.

“The advantage of merchandising salad kits in the produce department is that it provides an easy side-dish solution for busy shoppers,” explains Dixie Michie, marketing manager for Linsey Foods, Ltd., in Markham, ON, makers of ET TU Salad Kits. “The only disadvantage is that the merchandising spot provided for our salad kits in the produce department can vary over time from store-to-store, unless planogrammed. The consumer does not want to hunt for an item.”

Bakery Items. The bakery department at Kings Food Markets promotes a muffin of the month. In August, the featured flavor was raspberry. “We merchandized fresh raspberries over in the bakery with the muffins,” tells Kneeland. “We’ll also take the bakery’s mini-angel food cakes over to produce and display them next to the strawberries.”

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, in Vernon, CA, says, “Crepes have been one of our most successful non-produce items, and we’ve

sold them for 20 years.”

Seasonings. Herbs, spices and seasoning mixes represented 17.5 percent of the non-produce category sales during the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013, according to Nielson Perishables Group data.

Charles Olins, vice president of sales and marketing for Brockton, MA-based Concord Foods Inc., says, “Our dry guacamole seasoning mixes are our best-sellers. Many people don’t know how to make guacamole or will not take the time to chop herbs and spices.”

“Many consumers either don’t know how to make Southern-style greens or make them taste good without fatty seasonings,” explains Wiley Mullins, owner and president of Wiley’s Inc., a Fairfield, CT, manufacturer of fat- and cholesterol-free seasonings for fresh produce. “These products encourage consumers to eat more produce and in a healthy way.”

In addition to the Greens Seasoning, Uncle Wiley’s-brand products include Cajun Corn Boil, Sweet Potato & Yam Spice and Garlic Mashed Potato Seasoning. The company will introduce a kale chip spice this fall.

Vegetarian Foods. “Vegetarians don’t shop the meat department,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive officer of Frieda’s, Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. “This is why products such as soyrizo and soytaco should be merchandized in produce. In fact, retailers would be wise to create a central location in produce for plant-based products.”

Paul Eastman, sales manager for Garden Grove, CA-headquartered House Foods America Corporation, agrees. “The fresh produce shopper is going to look in produce for a vegetable-based protein like tofu. Natural foods stores display tofu in their wall delis. There’s a ‘disconnect’ there that concerns us. On the other hand, many conventional retailers put tofu in the well of a 4-foot refrigerated set with vegetarian cheese and other products. We suggest trying egg roll or wonton

wrappers on the next shelf up and vegetarian dressing on top.”

In addition to its line of tofu products and tofu shirataki (a gluten-free pasta substitute), the company introduced a pre-cooked 6.5-ounce vacuum-packed tofu cutlet in the spring of 2013. The product can be crumbled and added directly to salad greens.

Cheese. Kings Food Market’s Kneeland’s favorite companion product to merchandise in produce is cheese. “There are so many ways to create a tie-in: apples with white cheddar, a mammoth round of cheddar with broccoli, Gruyere with potatoes, a soft cheese with pears, or crumbled cheese with packaged salads.”

BelGioioso Cheese Inc., in Green Bay, WI, offers a salad blend of shredded Parmesan, Asiago and Romano cheese in 5-ounce refrigerated cups.

Formaggio, headquartered in Hurleyville, NY, takes this concept one step further with its Just Add Lettuce, a line of chunked cheese, vegetables, seasonings and spices marinated in olive oil that can be poured over lettuce to make a gourmet salad.

Anthony Mongiello, president and chief executive officer of Formaggio, explains, “Most salad dressings are liquid or two dimensional. Our product is three-dimensional. It’s not just a salad dressing, but a side dish or meal.”

The company expanded its refrigerated Just Add Lettuce line to include Blue Cheese and Cranberries, in addition to the original Greek, Spanish and Italian varieties. This fall, Formaggio will introduce its Bits and Pieces, a more finely chopped product that tosses easily with lettuce. The three flavors are Tomato & Basil, Italian Chef Salad and Roasted Pepper and Roasted Garlic.

Assorted Products. Jeff Fairchild, produce director at New Seasons Market, a 13-store chain based in Portland, OR, admits he backed away from cross-merchandising in recent years. However, he continues with what he says sparks a logical tie-in. “For example, I’ll put apple corers and apple cider in with the apple displays in the fall. Or, locally made jams and jellies next to the fresh berries so customers can enjoy the fruit now and later. It also shows we support all of our grower’s products.”

Mary Mooney, partner at Mooney Farms, in Chico, CA, says, “Consumers today are looking for flavorful but healthy choices when serving their family dinner.” She gives an example using a pasta primavera dish that includes broccoli, carrots, zucchini, and onion. “Tossing in our Bella Sun Luci sun-dried tomatoes in olive oil and Italian herbs completes the dish. We are glad that produce departments

across America have embraced sun-dried tomatoes and welcomed them into the area of the store that they belong.”

“Texture with flavor is key,” Sahale Snacks’ vice president of marketing, Erika Cottrell, says. “The mix of crunchy nuts and seeds with chewy fruits has proven to be a winner for Sahale Snacks. In particular, our sesame seeds, glazes and dried fruit infusions can deliver that satisfying texture in a single bite. We use dried pineapple in our Sing Buri blend [named for a province in Thailand], which is a popular

combination with the mild Chinese chili and ponzu glaze, but again, it is all about balance of flavors. Fruit and nuts are a wholesome salad topping option that makes a healthier and more interesting option to croutons.”

Regarding the sweet alternatives, Mary Beth Cowardin, director of marketing for produce at the Columbus, OH-headquartered T. Marzetti Company, says, “We’ve long been known for our old-fashioned caramel dip, which is sold along-side fresh apples.”

This fall, Concord Foods will introduce its

pumpkin-spice-flavored caramel dip for apples. The product will be sold in a 12-pack, a 10.5-ounce tub or a 32-count shipper.

Another dessert-style staple merchandised with strawberries is SACO Foods’ Dolci Frutta, a microwavable dip marketed in an 8-ounce container that creates a hard chocolate shell on fruit. Amy Verheyden, general manager of Middleton, WI-based SACO Foods, says, “The product has become so popular that retailers cross-merchandised it with other fruits like dried apricots in the fall.”

STEP TWO: Combine Strategy With Incentives

Kings Food Markets took an innovative approach to cross-merchandising. “Instead of bringing everything into the produce department, we also take produce to other departments,” Kneeland explains. “For example, we’ll take packaged French green beans, or corn on the cob, and asparagus (both organic and conventional) over to seafood. The produce is a totally impulsive purchase for the consumers while they wait to select their seafood.”

The key to Kings’ program is that every department gets the ring credit for its products. Plus, and most importantly, one person coordinates the cross-merchandising store-wide. It’s a plan that’s designed to assure all cross-promoted suggestions are not haphazard, but instead match the chain’s upscale brand strategy. As a result, shoppers now come in and look for the 6 to 7 tie-in suggestions presented throughout the store.

Kneeland says, “This is the second year of our ‘Inspired Pairing’ program and it’s been highly successful. It’s cross-merchandising taken to the next level.”

Side-By-Side. One of the biggest concerns of produce retailers is that non-produce items will take up valuable space that could be used to sell fruits and vegetables. Yet, the most profitable way to cross-merchandise is to display the two or more tie-in items side-by-side.

According to Kneeland, “Depending on requirements for refrigeration, we’ll either place our produce beside the item it complements or merchandise it on mobile ice table right next to it.”

“Adjacency is crucial,” explains Concord Foods’ Olins. “We’ve found our products sell up to five times as much when placed next to its produce companion compared to a pegboard in the corner.”

Linsey Foods’ Michie agrees. “Because the addition of lettuce is necessary to create an amazing salad, the merchandising position of



The advertisement features the House Foods logo at the top left. The main headline reads "A New Colorful Look for Our Plain White 'T'!". Below this, three packages of House Foods tofu are displayed: a large white package labeled "tofu FIRM", and two smaller packages, one blue and one purple, both labeled "tofu". The packages are surrounded by fresh produce including red chili peppers, tomatoes, blueberries, and purple onions. At the bottom, a red banner contains the text "Visit us at booth #1201 at PMA!" and the website "www.house-foods.com".

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our salad kits in the produce department encourages impulse purchases of not only the kit, but of romaine lettuce as well.”

Fresh Gourmet's McMath says, “The great thing about our products is that they are easily added to non-salad dishes that utilize fresh produce. Dishes such as fresh soups made from fresh produce (think butternut squash or tomato bisque topped with our Premium croutons and chicken soup with our Tortilla strips), burgers (loaded with lettuce, onions, tomatoes and our crispy onions), and lettuce wraps (filled with sautéed fresh produce and our Wonton Strips).”

Many companion product companies help to create vital extra space in the produce department by providing display units such as shippers and customized display solutions.

Concord Foods' Olins says, “Some retailers don't want a lot of shippers cluttering up the department, so this isn't a permanent solution. However, it works best if event-driven, such as cross-merchandising our guacamole next to avocados for Super Bowl. Beyond this, we also build customized fixtures for retailers such as shelf trays and racks.”

“Mooney Farms offers two new small foot-print metal floor displays with full color graphic headers in order to create a ‘sun-dried-tomato destination,’” says Mooney. “These racks hold either one case of all five dried tomato varieties or these items plus one case of all of the company's oil-packed products. Retailers can mix the bagged flavors customized to their store's needs.”

Signage & Recipes. To make cross-merchandising successful at Kings Food Market, Kneeland signs the pairings. “For example, if salmon is on special, we'll sign the French green beans with it together.”

“Signage is critically important,” explains Francis Wall, vice president of marketing for BelGioioso Cheese. “Show a photo of the finished dish and provide a recipe. This might not be as important for a display of fresh mozzarella, basil, tomatoes and olive oil. But, it would be ideal for recipes that require greater preparation — such as a fried eggplant and provolone sandwich or sautéed pears with mascarpone and brandy.”

Coupons & Promotions. An advantage of cross-merchandising is getting cents off and promotional help from other companies in order to sell more fresh produce.

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explains Mooney Farm's Mooney.

"Customers are incentivized to purchase Paramount Farms products in a number of ways," explains Seguin. "These include FSIs and online promotions with coupons for a financial discount. We also partner with retailers in-store to promote loyalty cards, in-store coupons, and multiple purchase deals."

Over the years, "we offered on-pack savings off our salad kit itself or off any romaine and/or lettuce item," says Linsey Foods' Michie. "We also participated in retailer digital coupon programs for savings off the kit. Since lettuce is necessary for using the product, a savings off either the kit or fresh produce results in a consumer benefit and we've seen spikes in sales of the kit and of the lettuce."

Concord Foods' Olins admits, "We do a lot of couponing, and it works. For example, when we put an IRC for 55-cents off on our Chiquita Banana Bread with the purchase of the mix and two bananas, redemption rate was 30 percent."

In January, Wiley's Mullins will launch a promotion in honor of the first annual "National Measure-Your-Waist Month." The campaign is designed to educate consumers about waist circumference and the risk of

chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes by enticing them to eat more fresh produce. Waistline measurement tapes are part of the program, and something supermarket dietitians can promote with customers.

STEP THREE: Consider Your Bottom Line

There's no research that details exactly what percent increase in sales retailers can expect on a specific produce item when it's cross-merchandised with non-produce products. However, anecdotal information is plentiful.

Kings Food Markets' Kneeland says, "We see a total life of an average 60 percent more when we tie-in; for example, French green beans with seafood, compared to baseline sales of the beans in produce."

On the other hand, Linsey Foods' Michie explains, "Historical data tells us that sales of our salad kits increase up to three-fold when placed near the lettuce. In-store feature pricing (with appropriate in-store feature signage), combined with a display of the kits near the romaine lettuce can create volume sales of five times normal."

Whether it's produce sales or companion products that benefit most from cross-merchandising, the choice may be a moot

point when considering the overall ring. For companion products, "we increase the basket value for our retailers by encouraging purchases of additional ingredients," explains Paramount Farms' Seguin.

Concord Foods' Olins agrees, "You can't use our guacamole mixes without buying at least two avocados per mix. Similarly, you can't make our apple crisp mix without buying 3 pounds of apples or our Chiquita Banana Bread without using two fresh bananas."

Finally, a perfect example of the profitable nature of cross-merchandising comes from Fresh Gourmet's McMath. He gives an example about a shopper looking to make a green bean casserole. The customer walks past the shipper-based cross-promotion featuring 55-cents off on the purchase of the company's crispy onions and fresh green beans. In order to make this recipe, the shopper must also purchase fresh mushrooms and garlic in the produce department and a can of chicken broth and cream of mushroom soup in grocery. Even discounting the 55-cent coupon, the shopper's basket ring of these six items totals \$11.50 compared to only \$2.99 for the green beans alone. That's an increase of 284.6 percent!

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San Luis Valley is 7,600 feet above sea level — the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial crops are grown and where the potato thrives.

San Luis Valley Offers Unique Potato Crop

With San Luis Valley's ideal natural conditions, industry players predict that demand will continue to improve through the fall and winter months.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

Surrounded by the backdrop of the majestic Rocky Mountains, potatoes grown in the San Luis Valley in southwestern Colorado are often touted as being compared to their adjacent beautiful scenery. Their high-altitude growing climate results in minimal pest and disease pressures, which contribute to high-quality potatoes that are attractive to buyers.

As harvest and distribution gains momentum throughout the San Luis Valley potato production region, growers and shippers are predicting that demand will continue to improve through the fall and winter months. At the same time, total volume shipped from the San Luis Valley this season is predicted to be less than last season, creating even more demand for this lighter crop.

A decrease in planted acreage, and a crop yield that is predicted to be down as well, will cause a natural reduction in overall volume for the 2013-14 shipping season.

According to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), planted

potato acreage in the San Luis Valley is at 49,700 planted acres, which is down from about 55,100 planted acres in 2012. This figure reflects an ongoing trend in a region that has shown a gradual acreage decline from a peak of 72,000-planted acres in 2002. Ehrlich says weak markets last season, along with uncertainties relating to water availability, and increasing costs for irrigation contributed to the reduction. Spotty hail, which damaged a few fields, compounded the problem. Some early diggings uncovered reduced yields, and that trend was predicted to continue.

Colorado ranks as the second largest fresh potato-producing state in the United States. Ehrlich points out that it is also the No. 2 state in organic, fresh potato production.

Although about 85 percent of the San Luis Valley spud volume is in russet varieties, Ehrlich says that Colorado can grow any kind of potato buyers' and consumers' desires. Purple potatoes, pink-skinned varieties, and unusually shaped potatoes are gaining the attention of a full range of consumers — from the executive chefs, to "foodies," to the creative home cooks who are seeking new,

imaginative ideas for their families, or for entertaining guests.

"Fingerlings are capturing more attention as well," says Ehrlich. A few San Luis Valley shippers are now offering these elongated, thin-shaped and assorted color Fingerlings in a mixed variety consumer pack. "Since the USDA changed its standards, allowing mixed varieties to be packed together, this creates a lot of opportunities for shippers and more options for buyers," explains Ehrlich.

Naturally 'Green' And Attractive Freight Advantage

The snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains surround the fertile San Luis Valley and provide a picture-perfect setting for growing potatoes. "It is here at 7,600 feet above sea level — the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial crops are grown — where the potato thrives," Ehrlich notes.

Variety in sizes, colors, and shapes of potatoes are not the only attractive characteristics of potatoes shipped from the San Luis Valley that draw new buyers. This region is a natural

WHAT'S NEW IN SAN LUIS VALLEY

Skyline Potato Co., Center, CO. The company announces the addition of Les Alderete as general manager of all operations. Alderete brings with him over 26 years in the produce industry, and 17 of those years were spent with Idaho potatoes.

According to Randy Bache, chief operations officer of JV Smith Companies, the parent company of Skyline Potato Co., "Throughout his years of service, Les has been instrumental in putting various deals together in the major russet potato growing areas of eastern and western Washington, Idaho, and Colorado that not only increased volume but also lowered costs to sheds of up to 40 percent."

Alderete comes to Skyline from L&M Companies, where he spent eight years as director of grower relations.

Skyline Potato Co. offers conventional and organic product lines and operates three packing sheds in the Center, CO, area. Bache also reports completion of a 50,000-square-foot addition for finished product storage to the Horizon packing-house, located a few miles south of the headquarters. In addition, three new Volm bagging machines were installed at the operations to increase packing efficiency and to provide volume for all consumer-sized bags. Two of the baggers were added to the Skyline packing facility, with one installed at the Horizon building.

MountainKing Potatoes, Monte Vista, CO. In addition to its primary facility in Monte Vista, Houston, TX-based MountainKing Potatoes will operate a packing facility in Center, CO, formerly operated by Canon Potato Co.

Although Canon Potato, a family-owned operation that had packed and shipped potatoes for more than 60 years, made the decision to cease operations in June, the packing shed will now operate under the new ownership of MountainKing.

"The close relationship between the

two entities made a natural fit," according to David Tonso, former president and chief executive officer of Canon Potato. "From my standpoint, one thing that made the arrangement with MountainKing so attractive is their desire to continue to employ past warehouse personnel from Canon."

RPE, Inc., Monte Vista, CO. This leading potato and onion grower/shipper based in Bancroft, WI, added two former members of Canon Potato Co. to its sales staff.

David Tonso joins RPE in sales after serving for several years as co-owner and acting chief executive officer of Canon Potato Co. in Center, CO. Canon Potato officially closed its doors in June. Tonso noted in a press release, "My family has known the Wysocki family for a long time, and I know the integrity and honesty of their operation. RPE has had so much growth, and they're doing such dynamic things. It fits right into what I want to do and I am looking for."

Matt Glowczewski spent the past 18 years in the sales department at Canon Potato Co. Previously, he was employed by a wholesale company in Pueblo, CO, where he worked in a variety of capacities for 10 years.

"We are thrilled to have David and Matt joining us and bringing their enthusiasm for the potato industry to our Colorado office," adds Russell Wysocki, president and CEO of RPE in the press release. "Having knowledgeable and experienced employees is an important part of our commitment to our customers and category expertise."

Tonso and Glowczewski are based in RPE's Monte Vista office.

Aspen Produce, LLC, Center, CO. The company announces the hiring of Naomi Guitierrez. Her primary duties are food safety monitoring and compliance, reports Michele Peterson, who is on the sales staff at Aspen Produce.

The company also confirmed it implemented "some new technology that puts us more in touch with the consumer," according to Jed Ellithorpe, in sales and marketing at Aspen Produce. Consumers can use their smartphones to scan the barcode on Aspen's packaging which, when downloaded, shows general information about Aspen Produce including photos from the fields. "It will help us gather more analytical data about the consumers, and it will also help bring more consumer awareness to the farming aspect of our business."

Farm Fresh Direct LLC, Monte Vista, CO. The grower-owned sales and marketing organization continues to expand its distribution of microwavable potato products that it introduced last year as part of its Jubilee line. Dave Yeager, vice president of sales and business development, reports that Farm Fresh added yellow, white, and red creamers as well as small sweet potatoes to the line.

These microwavable products complement the full-sized Russets that have been marketed since 2003, sold under the Express Bake PotatOH! label. Microwavable PotatOH! Fingerlings were the first in the Jubilee line and were introduced in 2011. The Jubilee products are packaged in 14-ounce trays and are washed and ready to put in the microwave. Yeager emphasizes that the tray is organic as well as compostable, and the film is BPA-free.

Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), Monte Vista, CO. "The area's administrative arm of the federal marketing order welcomes Rachael Warner as marketing and administrative assistant," announces Linda Weyers, assistant director of CPAC. Among her duties, Warner will coordinate activities involving CPAC's increasing presence in online social media including Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and LinkedIn. **pb**

fit for the multitudes that are going "green."

"We are more sustainable than any growing area," stresses Ehrlich. "Buying Colorado potatoes equals less 'food miles' with our natural freight advantage, we have less pesticide need, and fewer disease problems because of winter

kill. We are justifiably proud of our state and of our unique region."

"With its high elevation and low temperatures, winter freezing helps naturally sterilize the ground, reducing pest and disease pressures," Ehrlich explains. Cool weather also

contributes to a smoother-skinned potato.

Adding to the potatoes' allure is the Valley's centralized location, which provides a natural freight advantage and is becoming even more appealing as the popularity of buying locally-grown skyrockets.



David Tonso joined the sales staff at RPE, Inc. in Monte Vista, CO. Tonso is the former owner of Canon Potato Co.



Matt Glowczeski joined the sales staff at RPE, Inc., Monte Vista, CO. Glowczeski was with Canon Potato Co. for several years before joining RPE.



Randy Bache, president of Skyline Potato Co.

"While retailers strive to be more 'green,' Colorado's freight advantage is always in our favor," Ehrlich adds.

Pam Dunning, a Dallas-based potato buyer at Growers Exchange Co., Inc. servicing both retail and foodservice distributors, headquartered in Fort Fairfield, ME, concurs. "Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days — reducing shrink and making them fresher." She adds that one-stop

potato shopping available through a single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs.

"Delivery can sometimes even be done overnight," Dunning continues, describing the 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to some Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points.

Packaging Options And Private Labeling Increases

An ever-increasing percentage of San Luis Valley potatoes being packed under private

labeling reflect the trend of retail chains, and strong independent stores, choosing to market products with their own brand. Increased brand recognition contributes to consumer loyalty, and packers are working to meet this increasing need of retailers. Most area shippers agree that private labeling and specialty-size packaging are both seeing increased demand.

Randy Bache, chief operations officer of Yuma-AZ-based JV Smith Companies, the parent company of Skyline Potato Co. and Purely Organic, concurs. "We are now up to 80

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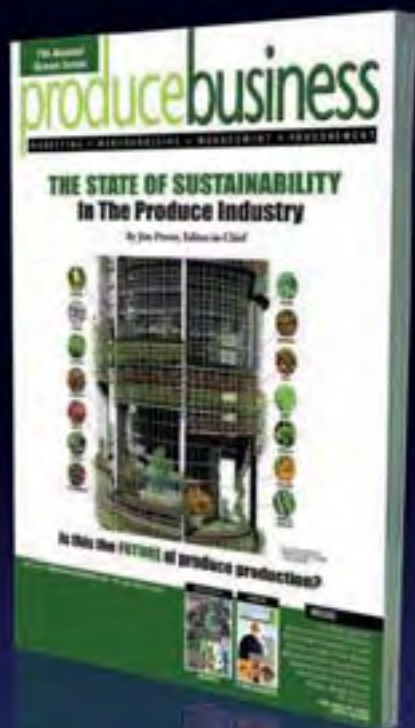
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The sales staff at Skyline Potato Co.:
(L-R) Glenn Stewart, Angela Diera and Roger Christensen



The Aspen Produce LLC sales staff:
(L-R) Michele Peterson, Ryan Haynie and Jed Ellithorpe



The Colorado Potato Administrative Committee:
(L-R) Jim Ehrlich, Rachel Warner and Linda Weyers

percent of our volume going to private labeling,” Bache estimates. “We will do whatever meets the needs of our customers. We are very progressive and are willing to make changes as change is needed. Because we grow a variety of products in addition to potatoes, we understand the entire produce industry — not just potatoes, and we can see the trends and adapt rapidly. The synergies of working with our parent company are what separate us from the pack here in the Valley.”

“We are seeing a lot more of specialty-size packaging,” notes Michele Peterson, in sales at

Aspen Produce LLC out of Center, CO. “Plus we are doing more 5-pound packages than ever before.”

Economically A Perfect Fit

Skyline Potato Co.’s Bache says potatoes remain among the best fresh-produce values for consumers. This even applies to organic potatoes — which some still perceive to carry higher prices. “We are a full-service potato company, with a year-round supply of potatoes — both conventional and organic,” says Bache.

The company’s holdings also include



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CPAC TAKES NUTRITION MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE

With its overall theme centering on the nutritional value of potatoes, the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee's (CPAC) primary focus this season is on enlarging its social media presence, according to Linda Weyers, assistant director of CPAC.

The committee's social media links to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn are all tools that Weyers says are being utilized to reach consumers, and all outlets are accessible through the committee's website (coloradopotato.org).

CPAC utilizes research by the U.S. Potato Board, which shows that Facebook remains the No. 1 online destination for consumers. Uppermost in promotional efforts is reaching "Linda," which the U.S. Potato Board has defined as a composite consumer who represents the target audience, a female 25 to 54 years old with children younger than 18 at home. "Linda" and her family account for 40 percent of all fresh potato consumption, according to the research.

For additional focus on the several social media options, CPAC recently hired Rachael Warner, marketing and administrative assistant. Among her duties, Warner will continually monitor and update the committee's Facebook page and will utilize its Pinterest account

for recipe distribution. "We know that our target market is using Pinterest, and we feel this is one of the best ways to reach 'Linda,'" Weyers emphasizes.

"We also want to get the word out about the nutritional qualities of potatoes in general," she adds. Different varieties of Colorado potatoes provide different nutrients. "The purples and deeper-colored varieties are very high in antioxidants, and the Russets and yellows are good sources of potassium and vitamin C."

In addition to accentuating the nutritional value of potatoes, CPAC will also emphasize their wide versatility, since more than 100 varieties of potatoes are grown in Colorado. In addition to the choices in Russets, reds, and yellows, San Luis Valley produces the nutritional superstar, Purple Majesty variety, and a wide assortment of fingerlings as well as other specialties.

She also emphasizes, "Potatoes are not fattening. It's what you choose to put on them, like lots of sour cream and/or butter, that are fattening."

The San Luis Valley growers and shippers had the opportunity to spread that word to a key group of athletes in June when, for the fifth time in the 28-year history of Ride the Rockies, CPAC members and volunteers cleaned,

wrapped, baked, and distributed thousands of spuds to road-weary cyclists during the 513-mile journey through Colorado's highest mountain regions. More than 2,000 cyclists and their support team members were served the energy-fueling potatoes. Servers also seized the opportunity to inform these health conscious riders of the health benefits of spuds.

An activity that keeps CPAC involved in promoting potatoes to school-age kids throughout the academic year is a K – 12 program. The curriculum is available to teachers throughout the state of Colorado with a curriculum developer who adapts the studies for each level. The study encompasses reading, writing, communications, science and history. Older students study nutrition and economics, and all ages engage in field trips to learn more about potato farming, storage, shipping and marketing.

The Produce Marketing Association's annual trade show and convention is another major event for CPAC. The San Luis Valley potato booth will be a part of the Colorado Pavilion at the PMA Fresh Summit in New Orleans October 17 to 20. The committee has its own booth space as well as independent shipper representation from the San Luis Valley. **pb**

Purely Organic, a separate packing facility for its organic volume. "We have a nice organic program that took 20 years to develop," Bache says. Because of the varying popularity of organics, "lots of handlers jump into organics — and then jump right back out. We've had a consistent supply for our customers."

The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Food Source Inc., West Chester, PA, using the Tomorrow's Organic label. "At the same time, we sell our own Nature Fresh organic label, which is available in the 3-, 5-, and 50-pound containers, through Skyline," Bache adds. "We will also pack private labels for organics as well as conventional potatoes."

Bache is concerned, however, that some of his organic growers are considering switching a portion of their land back to conventional-grown potatoes, creating a potential shortage of the organic spuds. "There is not a huge price differential like before, and they get lower



Jim Knutzon is the Chief Executive Officer of Monte Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct LLC.

yields from organics."

Whether conventional or organic, "Potatoes are a good food value — even during market years when prices are a little higher," touts Jim Knutzon, chief executive officer of Monte

Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct LLC. "And when food prices are high — and they are predicted to continue to increase — potatoes are perceived as an even better value."

Ernie Myers, general manager of Mountain Valley Produce LLC, Center, CO, agrees. "Consumers need to be reminded that potatoes are still one of the greatest values in the produce department, and they need more education relating to their versatility."

Multiply that value with the added bonus of being good for the environment. "People want to support locally grown to help cut fuel usage and costs," Skyline's Bache notes. "That's good for all of us."

According to Ray Keegan of American Produce Co. LLC, a Denver, CO-based receiver that services retail and foodservice accounts, "Colorado potatoes are fresher, they have more flavor and variety, and they are convenient as well as economical. They are the best answer for my customers." **pb**



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Presenting this **FLORAL BUSINESS** Masters of Merchandising supplement is on target with our mission to “INITIATE INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT.” The sponsors have combined promotion and education to help retailers sell more floral items. With plenty of photos for inspiration, the following pages show and tell the stories of the card vase, table top gardens and fresh-cut flower bouquets and arrangements. Keeping in mind retail profitability, the idea is to help super-market executives consider the right products and the best steps for floral teams when it comes to merchandising fresh flowers, plants and floral department products.

Want to sell more bouquets? Try offering your customers the new greeting card vase, which can be easily merchandised in or next to the floral cooler. The Blooming Greetings™ card vase offers consumers convenience and fun because they can select a card with the appropriate sentiment, grab a bouquet and pay for their purchase. If rushing back to the office from lunch hour, the gift giver signs the card, unfolds it into a vase and then adds the water and flowers. This means no rushing around with breakable glass or heavy ceramic vases. A whimsical yet substantial gift from the floral department is that easy! To make merchandising convenient for retailers, several display options are available – everything from floor spinners to a rack for cooler side panels.

The popularity of bringing the outdoors in is captured in photos published in consumer magazines featuring home décor tips and DIY gardening projects. Table top gardens are all the rage for home decoration, as thoughtful, long-lasting gifts and as planters to enjoy in the workplace. Decorate your floral department with lucky bamboo, tillandsia, pachira and other indoor plants that consumers want for their homes. Penang Nursery offers tips and suggestions on how to display the table top gardens to increase your floral department sales.

Looking beyond the floral department for increased floral rings is suggested by The USA Bouquet Company with the newest additions of its Essential Living Program. Designed with cross merchandising in mind, the national distributor of fresh-cut flower bouquets and arrangements offers Cool Quenchers and Sweet Treats. Retailers appreciate this promotional program because the bouquets offers recipe cards promoting products from other departments including produce and bakery.

Retailers, take advantage of our offers to send you a PDF of this supplement or printed copies of this guide (while supplies last) to pass along to store managers. If you are a floral vendor and would like to see your category in the next **FLORAL BUSINESS** Masters of Merchandising supplement, please contact me, E. Shaunn Alderman, Floral Department Marketing Strategist, **FLORAL BUSINESS**, 561-703-4010, SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com.

E. Shaunn Alderman
FLORAL BUSINESS



FLORAL BUSINESS Masters of Merchandising is an advertising supplement in **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. In addition, **FLORAL BUSINESS** — a magazine providing important how-to information on topics such as pricing, labor, space-to-sales, seasonal promotions, care and handling, value-added services, etc. — is published and inserted into **PRODUCE BUSINESS** in the March, June, September and December issues.

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CARD VASE

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Your customers will be captivated by the convenience of being able to upgrade their own selection of flowers. They will select the card vase by choosing from the everyday product line which includes 14 sentiment categories such as Birthday, Love, Anniversary, Baby, Get Well, etc. The retail packages are color coded and list the sentiment category at the top of the package to help consumers locate their category of interest. As a greeting card, blooming greetings™ offers consumers an array of designs and messages for many occasions. As a vase, blooming greetings™ will hold a full bouquet of flowers – twice as many as other temporary vases.

Consumers find the vase very easy to assemble and the directions on the package are simple to follow. Just fold out to form the vase and then add water and flowers! The product is 100% water-tight and the outer vase is coated for water resistance.

We've made merchandising blooming greetings™ card vases easy by offering a line of fixtures that best fit your floral department. We recommend the 3-foot 40 design wire rack which can be positioned as a shelf fixture or placed in the floral cooler for those reach-in purchases. Displayed POP material will

explain how to use the card vase or your customers can see an assembled card vase permanently displayed on the rack. Additional options to showcase the everyday line and seasonal selection of blooming greetings™ include a spinner rack, side panel and a countertop display kit.



Our card vase is the unique, innovative, convenient product you've been waiting for to help stimulate your floral bouquet sales. Men like the convenience – the DIY assembly of the vase and the ease of selecting the right sentiment. Ideal for busy moms, blooming greetings™ offers portability, style and innovation. Great for an office gift, for visiting a sick friend, or even as a welcoming gift for a new neighbor, our card vase will help you sell more flowers!



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Focusing On Floral Throughout the Year

Dear Supermarket Floral Executive:

For nearly 30 years PRODUCE BUSINESS has been building meaningful relationships in the floral, produce and foodservice arenas. You've seen our award-winning magazine every month and you've been a part of our success. As we head toward our 30th year, we would like to thank you for your support and offer assurance we will continue to provide you with information needed to effectively market, merchandise, procure and manage the dynamics of your floral departments.

This FLORAL BUSINESS Masters of Merchandising is one of our many efforts to present you and your floral teams with valuable information to help you merchandise floral products to greater success. In addition, the quarterly issues of FLORAL BUSINESS distributed in the March, June, September and December issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS offer you and your teams continued support with articles about floral sustainability, consumer buying trends, marketing, merchandising and inventory management. Based on your feedback and participation, we will continue the popular Retail Profiles where we photograph your floral department and publish a Q & A interview – giving readers insight to the challenges and triumphs your store experiences every day. Go to www.FloralBusinessMagazine.com to see past profiles and let us know if you are interested in having us visit your floral department.

We know your day starts early, frequently ends late, and often there seems to be little time to stay in-the-know with industry happenings. From what you tell us, this is why you appreciate receiving posts and news from the Floral channel of our www.PerishableNews.com. With a free subscription, you can select the delivery frequency – daily, weekly, etc., and also click on the Archives to view news stories, announcements and other posts from the past. And if you have announcements, we are happy to help spread your news by posting your press release on the Floral channel of our [PerishableNews.com](http://www.PerishableNews.com).

Because of our relation to the produce department and all the intricacies that side of the business entails, witnessing and documenting industry changes through the years enables us to view the floral side of the supermarket industry from a matchless position. We know our role is to help you build, improve and make your floral operation profitable. Thank you for your readership, feedback, participation and continued interest in our floral coverage.

Sincerely,

Ken Whitacre
Publisher/Editorial Director

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TABLE TOP GARDENS

For more than 30 years, Penang Nursery Inc. has been a grower and distributor of foliage and home décor gardens across North America. We are located in Apopka, Florida, the Indoor Foliage Capital of the World. We continue to develop trend setting and creative foliage décor products at an exceptional value. Penang offers products ranging from Lucky Bamboo, Bonsai, and Table Gardens to Terrariums and Air Plants.



PROMOTIONAL/ADVERTISING IDEAS

It's not always about what is the latest and greatest. Often, it's as simple as getting potential customers to pause at your product display because they want to see something that catches their eye. To draw customers' attention, highlight key items with color themes and use interesting shelving fixtures. Enticing everyday shoppers to take a step closer will persuade them to give your product a second look.



DISPLAY CARE AND HANDLING

No one knows a product better than the supplier who spends weeks or months preparing an order and nurturing his/her plants. Ask your supplier to put an instruction sheet in the box that will be seen immediately when the box is opened at its destination for any products with special handling or care requirements. Be sure to instruct store personnel who receive the product to keep an eye out for any special instructions. Pass that information onto customers who purchase the product.



CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

When merchandisers construct a themed or holiday display from multiple categories, it inspires customers to decorate their homes with related products. This not only generates increased sales in the floral department but can increase sales of related items from other categories.



QUICK TIPS:

- Showcase Lucky Bamboo or Bonsai plants as an ideal "living" gift item.
- Promote indoor gardens such as Table Gardens or Terrariums for cold winter months.
- Price points are key — make sure you are catering for customer demographics.
- Match your products to seasons, focusing around holidays.

FRESH CUT FLOWER BOUQUETS AND ARRANGEMENTS

The USA Bouquet Company is a leading national distributor of fresh-cut flower bouquets and arrangements. The partnering of the best growers worldwide assures delivery of variety, quality and competitive pricing while at the same time mitigating supply risk encountered by single origin suppliers.

We source more than 200 million stems annually with a vast choice by variety. Product is procured from several source countries and a large percentage is purchased from U.S. domestic growers. Our market-driven model allows us to offer a global variety of products and offer our customers the security of consistent supply.

Innovation in marketing, manufacturing and logistics is vital to our leadership role in helping our customers drive sales outside the lines. Cross merchandising, cause marketing, category management and vendor-managed inventory are just a few of the innovative initiatives USA Bouquet brings to customers to improve both their top-and bottom-line performances.

CROSS-MERCHANDISING

Reach floral customers beyond the floral department with our many market-driven promotion programs. Our cross-merchandising ideas help supermarkets drive sales not only in floral but other



departments. Our Essential Living Program joins seasonal fruit and produce with floral bouquets that promote recipe ideas. USA Bouquet's newest collections for cross-merchandising include Cool Quenchers and Sweet Treats. Cool Quenchers tie-in fruit and other supermarket items to make a refreshing drink. Sweet Treats are a creative way to sell cupcakes from the baked goods department or encourage home baking. These bouquet lines include recipe cards which are a hit with consumers! Marketing our category outside the traditional box will lead to long term floral customers.

CAUSE MARKETING

Consider cause marketing as a successful step to generate sales and connect with customers. National, regional or local causes give customers the opportunity to give back. A shopper

who does not normally buy flowers may do so for a united cause such as American Cancer Society, Autism Speaks, American Forestry and American Heart Association. The USA Bouquet Company is involved in several cause marketing programs. Cause Marketing is our company's way of spreading awareness about a variety of environmental and social issues and partnering with organizations to help make a positive impact in the world.



SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Assure your customers the flowers you offer from The USA Bouquet Company are grown in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible manner. Certifications are in place to ensure all flowers grown and harvested meet specific social and environmental standards. We promote participation in the Rainforest Alliance Certification Program and we partner with Fair Trade Certified farms. The farm workers are given the opportunity to invest in the development of their communities, better schooling for their children and work in an environment which uses sustainable farming methods.

NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Our national manufacturing and distribution footprint enables our team of more than 500 employees to expertly serve our customers. The USA Bouquet Company is the only major floral distributor with full-service locations in six of the country's main ports of entry — Miami, FL, Atlanta, GA, Cresskill, NJ, Chicago, IL, Dallas, TX, and San Diego, CA. Each of the company's locations attend to all aspects of the retail industry with expert services ranging from basic farm-made bouquets and high-end hand-tied bouquets to elaborate wedding designs. This forward distribution model has established the company as a leading partner in the e-commerce arena to the world's most recognized brands.





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10 Ways Retailers Can Generate Big Apple Sales Year-Round

Fruit's versatility, better pricing for consumers, growth of organics, national promotions and new varieties could be catalysts for driving traffic to the apple display. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



Recent data shows that the East and Midwest collectively will harvest crops 472 percent higher than in 2012.

Merchandising apples has come a long way since the days when fruit was synonymous with fall, and Red Delicious ruled. Varieties like Gala, Fuji and Honeycrisp have come on strong, gaining market share and larger displays. Growth in organics, trendy pack styles and promotions based on more than price likewise demonstrate an evolution in the way retailers reach consumers.

Today, this American fruit is one of the top dollar stars in Produce. Retail sales of apples during the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013, reached 6.7 percent of produce sales, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based fresh food consulting firm. This percentage pushed apples to the No. 3 category in produce, behind berries and bagged salads and ahead of bananas and grapes.

"The apple category is huge. Just look at what Honeycrisp has done for the group, and the potential of finding the 'next Honeycrisp' among all the new premium varieties," says Jay Schneider, produce and floral director at

Acme Markets, a 113-store chain headquartered in Philadelphia, PA.

1. Abundance And Favorable Pricing

There will be no shortage of domestic apples for promotion this season. According to the Vienna, VA-headquartered U.S. Apple Association (USApple), the 2013 crop is estimated at 243.3 million pounds, or 14 percent above 2012, making it the twelfth largest crop

since U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) records began in 1980. USApple's estimate is the only official national crop estimate this year since the USDA's estimate was eliminated due to budget cuts.

By region, the East and Midwest collectively will harvest crops 472 percent higher than in 2012 and 61 percent greater than the five-year average. New York is the second largest apple-producing state in the nation,



Playful 'Appletizeme' Promotion Set To Entice Consumers

The U.S. Apple Association (USApple), headquartered in Vienna, VA, will replace its traditional and long-standing National Apple Month in-store display contest with an internet-based campaign designed to educate and entice consumers to try the wide range of apple varieties now available.

Wendy Brannen, director of consumer health and public relations for the U.S. Apple Association (USApple), in Vienna, VA, says, "Appletizeme" is our new national effort. It's designed as a fun way to encourage people to discover their ideal apple variety based on their personality. Because their apple match may not be their go-to apple, they have the chance to learn about new varieties. In addition,

participants can also find the perfect apple food or beverage pairing based on their personality traits."

For example, the McIntosh is personified as "Geek Chic" and suggested to pair with cheese fondue. Gala is the "Social Butterfly" and pairs well with Marzetti Sweet & Salty Caramel Dip.

The "AppletizeMe" campaign is designed for the fast-growing Millennial shopper, yet relevant for all consumers. It includes an online microsite labeled, "Know Your Apple, Find Your Apple Personality." The microsite has social media plug-ins for easy sharing, recommended sponsor pairings, health and nutrition information, e-coupons, and sweepstake prizes. The campaign is backed by a national media relations outreach. **pb**

"Growers are making adjustments in pricing to move the crop. Retailers need to recognize this and set their prices accordingly. This means more opportunity for retail promotions and features as well as better pricing for consumers."

— Jim Allen, New York Apple Association (NYAA)

behind Washington, and Michigan takes the third spot.

"We're back to normal, plus more this season, due to near perfect growing conditions and recent plantings that are coming into production," says Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association (NYAA), in Fishers, NY. "The crop estimate may exceed 30 million bushels. This comes after an early-season freeze decimated much of the state's crop last year and left us with around 17 million bushels."

"Michigan growers are also expected to harvest approximately 30 million bushels of apples, up from only 3 million last year when unusual weather destroyed most of the crop," explains Diane Smith, executive director of the Michigan Apple Committee (MAC), in Lansing, MI. "This predicted size would be one of the largest apple crops the state has seen," she says.

John Schaefer, president of Jack Brown Produce, Inc., in Sparta, MI, concurs. "We

expect production in the state to be up even more over the next five years, with an emphasis on the fresh market. This is due to growers planting more acreage, better varieties and improved management techniques."

USApple's estimate puts the Washington apple crop at 8 percent below the record set in 2012, but 5 percent above the five-year average.

"Intermittent hail decreased volume slightly, but we have plenty of apples for promotion," says Mac Riggan, vice president of marketing for Chelan Fresh in Chelan, WA. "The initial estimate was 112 to 115 million boxes, but I think with the good quality that we're seeing, pack-outs should reach 120 million or more."

2. Use 80/20 Rule To Reflect Consumer Preferences

Six apple varieties represent nearly 82 percent of all category sales at U.S. retail stores. These are Gala (25.1 percent), Red Delicious (14.8 percent), Fuji (13.8 percent),

Honeycrisp (11.9 percent), Granny Smith (10.7 percent), and Golden Delicious (5.6 percent), according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group for the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013.

Howard Nager, who is vice president of marketing for Domex Superfresh Growers, in Yakima, WA, thinks mainline varieties should remain front-and-center because they are driving sales. "These mainline varieties should be the focus of retail space and attention as this is what is driving the business. There are many new varieties that are now available and can be merchandised on secondary displays or side tables, but should not take away space from the mainline varieties."

Gala, which is steadily increasing in popularity, also is seeing a surge in production, explains Wendy Brannen, USApple's director of consumer health and public relations. "Four years ago, it took over second place in total U.S. production, and we expect that Gala production nationally will be near or more than 40 million bushels in the 2013 crop."

"Red Delicious still is the largest variety grown, but a fair amount goes to overseas markets," explains Jim Mertz, co-owner of Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc., in Caldwell, ID. One of the largest factors for Red Delicious' popularity on the domestic market is it's a variety that responds well to storage protocols and consequently is available year-round.

"Most of the newer varieties wrap up in March and April," asserts Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers, Inc., in Wenatchee, WA. "However, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious are now 12-month apples, and we had Gala last year until June and Fuji into July. This means we have four apple varieties available domestically for the full year."

"Fuji is our best selling variety because it's always available, but in the fall, Honeycrisp is No. 1," says Jeff Fairchild, director of produce for New Seasons Market, a 12-store chain based in Portland, OR. "Honeycrisp gives a big shot in the arm to the category right out of the gate."

"Don't forget another one of the perennial favorites," says USApple's Brannen. "Granny Smith is a tried-and-true variety that is going strong, and we expect this to continue."

3. Promote Regional Favorites And New Varietals

There are several apple varieties that are regional cash-register ringers — even though their sales figures don't rank them high on a national scale.

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What The Large Apple Crop Means For Retailers

The price of apples will be more favorable than last year, according to the Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association (NYAA), in Fishers, NY. “Growers are making adjustments in pricing to move the crop. Retailers need to recognize this and set their prices accordingly. This means more opportunity for retail promotions and features, and better pricing for consumers.”

“This deflation — due to greater availability — means we need to sell more apples to overcome this hurdle,” says Jay Schneider, produce and floral director at Acme Markets. “One of our solutions is tote bags. For example, if you sell bulk apples at 99-cents per pound, customers may buy only one or two apples. But if you sell a 3- to 4-pound tote for 99-cents per pound, you

automatically get a higher ring. Totes give more lift and drives category sales.”

It’s also important to maintain a strategic varietal mix in order to ensure maximum sales potential.

“The risk is not to increase volume by trading people down,” advises Steve Lutz, former executive vice president at the Nielsen Perishables Group and now vice president of marketing for Columbia Marketing. “The best apple customer is driven by fresh, healthy and premium attributes rather than price, but many shoppers will trade down when given incentives. The retail shelf is a zero-sum game: purchase behavior is dictated by what’s on the shelf. This provides substantial opportunity for retailers to sustain higher values by shelf discipline, price management and variety control.” **pb**

“Our most popular are Royal Gala, McIntosh and Ginger Gold,” says Chris Pollock, marketing manager for BC Tree Fruits Cooperative, in Kelowna, British Columbia.

On the opposite coast, Lee Peters, vice president of sales and marketing at Fowler Brothers, Inc. in Wolcott, NY, says a different varietal mix meets the demand of his customers. “Empire and McIntosh are our two best-sellers.”

Eastern-grown apples such as Empire, Jonagold and Macoun resonate especially well with shoppers at Acme Markets, says Schneider. “Locally grown is huge; for us this means apples grown in states such as Pennsylvania and New York. We’ll merchandise Eastern apples in printed totes in a 3- to 4-foot area adjacent to the bulk display or inside the front lobby of the stores where we had the locally grown fruits and vegetables during the summer. This is in addition to our West Coast apple program.”

Honeycrisp continues to fall into the “newer varietal” category for many retailers even though it’s now a Top 10 national seller.

“It’s important to recognize that new varieties can take from 12 to 20 years to bring to



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market,” explains USApple’s Brannen. “The Honeycrisp, for example, released roughly 20 years ago, is now one of the fastest growing varieties. Just five years ago, the production level was barely detectible.

Honeycrisp’s five-year surge occurred for two reasons: First, explains Jack Brown’s Schaefer, “it’s a variety that has really captured consumers. Instead of growers pushing it out there to sell, Honeycrisp has consumer pull.” Secondly, Honeycrisp commanded an unprecedented price.

“In the old days, no one wanted apples above 99-cents per pound,” says Keith Matthews, chief executive officer of First Fruit Marketing of Washington, in Yakima, WA. “This old standard has gone away as consumers are willing to pay \$2.99 or higher for Honeycrisp.”

In fact, Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for the Rainier Fruit Company, in Selah, WA, says, “During the period from September 1, 2012 to March 21, 2013, Honeycrisp was the highest priced per pound apple,

“Red Delicious and Golden Delicious are now 12 month apples and we had Gala last year to June and Fuji into July. This means we have four varieties of apples available domestically for the full year.”

— Roger Pepperl, Stemilt Growers, Inc.

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No. 2 in dollar sales and No. 5 in volume sales, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.”

Clearly Honeycrisp brings real value and profit to the apple category. “We start with East Coast Honeycrisp around Labor Day and ride it out to the last box ships out of the West, usually around the second or third week in February,” says Acme Markets’ Schneider.

“It’s tough to replace the dollars from Honeycrisp. At the same time, we’re always looking for the next Honeycrisp or what we can put out on the shelf that might give us the same success. All the shippers are coming out with proprietary varieties,” he says.

“The key is to get customers to start looking for these in order to grow them into a bigger part of the entire category. To achieve this effect, you can’t put them in a row with the other apples. Customers won’t see them. We use dedicated end caps, pop-up bins and other point-of-sale (POS) provided by our suppliers,” says Schneider.

“Varietals, primarily driven by ‘club’ varieties from Washington, have grown by more than 50 percent the past two seasons,” explains Rainier Fruit’s Wolter. “These new varieties are giving consumers more flavor options and allowing retailers to drive additional dollars into the apple category.”

Sweet Tango, Kiku, Lady Alice, Envy, Junami, Pink Lady, Piñata, Ambrosia and Jazz are other varieties starting to register with retail market data gatherers, such as the Nielsen Perishables Group. In addition to many of these primarily West Coast-grown apples, New York introduced two new varieties. Snap Dragon is a bright red apple cross between Honeycrisp and an unnamed New York variety parentage that harvests in September, while Ruby Frost is a red-colored October apple bred from Braeburn and Autumn Crisp. There may be some Ruby



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Is Apple Consumption Really Flat?

Per capita consumption of fresh apples looks like it has hit a plateau in the U.S. According to figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, Americans ate an average of 15.61 pounds of fresh apples during the 2001-2002 season. This bumped up to 17.73 pounds in 2006-2007 before returning to a projected 15.88 pounds in 2012-2013.

"In spite of USDA data showing consumption is flat for the prime apple selling months of September 2012 through March 2013, Nielsen Perishables Group data show both retail dollars and volume are up over the previous year," says Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for the Rainier Fruit Company, in Selah, WA.

"Apple retail price was up 11.8 percent over the previous year, dollar sales were up 15.5 percent and volume sales were up 3.3 percent. This is the first time anyone in the industry can recall an instance where both dollar sales and volume were up on apples. Usually, higher prices can lead to lower volume sales," says Wolter. "The apple total contribution to the produce department during this same time was up 0.5 percent."

Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association (NYAA), in Fishers, NY, says, "We are continually told that apple consumption is flat, but I'm not willing to buy that. We've been in a demand situation for the past three to four years. Even when the industry is up and down in quantity, we still sell

everything we grow."

One reason for the discrepancy, explains Wendy Brannen, director of consumer health and public relations for the U.S. Apple Association (USApple), in Vienna, VA, is that "the USDA data does not capture one trend that is increasing — consumption of fresh apples purchased at farmer's markets and roadside and orchard direct-to-consumer fruit stands. With the increased interest by consumers on buying local produce, apple growers, especially in the eastern U.S., have increasingly used farmer's markets and orchard fruit stands to sell fresh apples."

In addition, there have been two major changes in the apple industry over the past several years that helped spike consumer interest and purchases. One is the mix of apples we have now. "We're into second generation and higher quality on mainstream apples, like Gala, and there's been an explosion of new varieties on the market," says Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers, Inc., in Wenatchee, WA. "We also have extended our marketing season to nearly year-round on a couple of varieties. Taken together, this has helped to gain the apple category more shelf space at retail, and shoppers buy what's on the shelf."

Then there's the health card. "Recent research showing the health benefits of apple consumption for weight control, Alzheimer's, diabetes, heart disease and blood pressure is affecting consumer preference for apples in a positive way," adds USApple's Brannen. **pb**

Frost available for test-marketing this summer, according to the NYAA.

The major marketing time frame grower-shippers used to introduce new varieties, especially those that store well, is after the first of the year when competition from Honeycrisp starts to ebb. However, as protocols to store a Honeycrisp improve, grower-shippers may have to re-think this strategy.

"As varieties go deeper into the year with better quality, I think we'll start to see the windows for specific apples defined by quality," says Stemilt's Pepperl. "For example, Sweet Tango markets best right away in August and September, Piñata develops an

even better flavor in storage, so we bring it out in January."

4. Stock Organically Grown

"Organically grown apples become more popular with customers every year," says Acme's Schneider. "We'll merchandise the organic apples in bushel baskets in front of the conventional apple displays so shoppers can see all of their choices. It's a good way to get them to trade up."

Organic apples accounted for 6.7 percent of total apple retail sales during the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013, up 0.6 percent over the year prior, according to Nielsen Perishables

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“We’ll merchandise the organic apples in bushel baskets in front of the conventional apple displays so shoppers can see all of their choices. It’s a good way to get them to trade up.”

— Jay Schneider, Acme Markets

Group data. Moreover, organic apple sales increased 27 percent in dollars and 10 percent in volume during the period from September 1, 2013 to June 15, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data as provided by the Rainier Fruit Company.

Apples are a gateway item into the organic segment for retailers and consumers alike, asserts Rainier’s Wolter. “We’ve found the organic consumer tends to be more adventurous and willing to try the new club varieties when available as an organic option or leaning toward the Gala, Fuji, Honeycrisp and Pink Lady.”

Domex’s Nager agrees, “The organic apple category is led by Gala (40 percent of organic retail apple sales), Fuji (19 percent), Honeycrisp (10 percent) and Red Delicious (10 percent). These four varieties comprise almost 80 percent of organic apple sales.”

“While demand for organic apples is double-digit, production is plateauing,” says Stemilt’s Pepperl. “One reason is that we lost a tool to fight fire blight [a bacterial disease that attacks apple and pear trees]. This means there’s a greater risk of loss to farming organic orchards until new methods are found. Another reason is a leveling in prices between conventional and organic. This makes earning a profit too tight in off-crop years. So unfortunately, we have a growing demand that the supply side isn’t meeting.”

5. Bigger Is Better, But Smaller Can Be Great Sellers

Optimal growing conditions across the country mean this year’s crop of apples have sized up nicely.

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for the Sage Fruit Company, head-



quartered in Yakima, WA, says, “The majority of the Washington crop will size larger, between 88s and 72s.”

New York apples will peak on larger sizes as well, according to the NYAA, while in Michigan, Jack Brown’s Schaefer says, “We’ll peak a little larger for us, around 113s and 125s. The key, though, is to be able to deliver a range of sizes.”

BC Tree Fruits’ Pollock advises, “When offering a two-size program in bulk, make sure there’s a visual size difference. For example, a 72 and larger and 110 to 113 and smaller.”



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Large and small apples are profitably merchandised at Acme Markets. "We display size 88s and larger in bulk and offer smaller apples in 3- and 5-pound bags. Bags of small apples provide incremental dollars. We've featured a 5-pound bag on the cover of the weekly circular with good success. Sometimes we've run mix-and-match ads on 5-pound bags of eastern Galas and Red Delicious."

6. Handle With Care

"Maintain the cold chain to keep apples at their crisp and crunchiest," recommends Jack Brown's Schaefer. "We assure apples are kept between 34 to 36 degrees Fahrenheit until point of delivery. Retailers need to maintain this temperature in storage and ideally at display."

Yet, there's a Catch 22 when it comes to display and refrigeration.

Chelan Fresh's Riggan explains, "Refrigeration is usually at the perimeter of the store. We as an industry keep squeaking that we want our apples in a prime location, but the prime location is usually unrefrigerated. One way to work this out is to refrigerate apples in the summer and display in an unrefrigerated prime location in the fall."

"In addition to refrigeration, handle apples

with care to prevent bruising, blistering or puncturing," advises Julie Bancroft, executive director of the Harrisburg, PA-headquartered Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program.

"Rotating should be done every time apples are replenished on display," says Rainier Fruit's Wolter. "Place newer apples on the bottom and older ones on the top."

When re-ordering, the MAC's Smith advises, "Pay attention to buying habits and order according to demand."

7. Consider Pouches To Move Product

Packaged apples accounted for 29.1 percent of total category sales in the 52-weeks ending June 29, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

"Most of the packaged apples sold at New Seasons Market are in polybags," says Fairchild. "Three-pound polybags sell well for us."

"Themed polybags as well as totes prove successful to increase apple sales," says Sinks of Sage Fruit, which recently teamed up with NBC's Biggest Loser brand as the exclusive supplier of apples, pears and cherries. "Retailers who used our Biggest Loser bags experienced a 15 percent increase over the same time last year. This year, we'll introduce

our new Biggest Loser-themed bin."

In addition to polybags and totes, Acme Markets offers apples in clamshell and sleeve packs. "We'll dip our toe in the water this season with the new pouch bags," says Schneider. "They're a great idea. Customers can see the apples through the clear film and there's a handle to make pick-up easy. Some marketers are targeting kids, which is perfect for smaller-sized apples."

Stemilt Growers introduced its Lil Snap-pers line of small-sized apples packed in colorful 3-pound pouch bags last year. This season, Pepperl explains, "We'll start with a full variety of Braeburn, Fuji, Granny Smith, Gala, Honeycrisp, Piñata and Pink Lady in October, and expand to include a Gala and Sunkist navel bag in November."

This fall, Columbia Marketing International, in Wenatchee, WA, will introduce 2-pound high-graphic pouch bags of small Granny Smith, Fuji, Gala and Red Delicious with a retro cartoon and "hero-branded" theme that promotes healthful eating while appealing to kids and parents. The bags can be merchandised in a two-box shipper.

The cost of pouch bags is estimated at 10 percent more than plain poly bags.



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8. Use Variety To Sell Apples

Some 20 to 25 varieties of apples or more are displayed in the fall at New Seasons Markets, while six varieties are the norm during the off-peak or summer months.

To rev up sales, offer consumers a complete variety representing all the apple category segments: mainline, varieties, club, large/small, bags and special in/out items, recommends Rainier Fruit's Wolter. "Eliminating items that generate less than 1 percent of category volume has a positive impact by allowing the retailer to focus space and energy on performing items. The right apple mix provides value, variety and quality to consumers while generating strong revenues and profits for the retailer."

As for optimum display space, Domex's Nager says, "Apples are a major contributor to sales in the produce department — hitting 16 percent of sales during the fourth quarter. At a minimum, 80 square feet of display space should be allocated to apples to maximize sales."

Secondary display units used, both in and out of the produce department, can help garner the apple category additional space. In addition, Chelan Fresh's Riggan says, "Secondary displays provide customers with a

second look at the product and second opportunity for purchase. So much about apple sales is impulse."

Schneider says Acme Markets utilizes pop-up bins for display.

Most major grower/shippers offer a variety of bins and shippers, many of which are imprinted with graphics, information and even QR codes that assist in merchandising. This season, Rainier Fruits will offer two new display bins: one for organic apples and the other specifically for organic Honeycrisp.

9. Go Beyond Caramel Dip When Cross-Merchandising Apples

Apples and caramel dip are a famously loved pairing. However, caramel dip isn't the only viable option when it comes to cross-merchandising apples.

"Cross-merchandise apples with apple products such as juice, cider, fruit leathers and other snackables," recommends BC Tree Fruits' Pollock. "Many of the companies that make these products buy their apples from our members, so it helps to sell more apples overall."

"Beyond this, the sky is the limit," says Sage Fruit's Sinks. "Apples are so versatile. You

can cross-merchandise them with pie crusts, cheeses, put a small display by the bagged salads or demo cut apples with yogurt."

Last year, Chelan Fresh offered retailers a promotional tie-in on bagged apples, Fresh Express-brand salad and Lighthouse-brand dressing for shoppers to make a Waldorf salad. All three products were merchandised in one bin and tied together with an instant redeemable coupon (IRC). Coupon redemption rate was 6 percent.

In August, the company kicked-off a three-month promotion where shoppers who buy a 3- or 5-pound bag of Trout-brand apples get a 55-cent IRC on any Jif To Go product. The IRC was affixed to the Kwik-Lok closure of 2.4 million bags of apples.

"The benefit of cross-merchandising is that it gives retailers a higher ring by giving shoppers usage ideas," says Jack Brown's Schaefer.

10. Think Beyond Price

Price or ad promotions are the most popular way to promote apples at retail. "Ad frequency sends a message," says Rainier Fruit's Wolter. "Mixing the ad items and types of ads maximizes impact. A combination of mainline and varieties/rising stars/club are an



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effective mix. Maintain segment pricing during promotions, this reinforces the varieties premium positioning and also tempts the shopper to trade up.”

However, promotions shouldn’t solely be based on price.

“In-store apple tastings happen the first weeks of October and November at New Seasons Markets,” says Fairchild. “We actively demo an assortment of apples to customers in the front of the store so they can sample and keep shopping. Once they’ve tried, it

lessens the risk of buying some of the higher priced varieties.”

“Demos are one tactic retailers, such as Sobeys, PriceSmart Foods, Safeway, Walmart and Save-On-Foods, across Canada use to celebrate ‘Apple Month’ in February,” explains BC Tree Fruits’ Pollock. “This timing coincides with the opportunity to show customers they can still enjoy fresh apples. We help our retailers in western Canada promote this theme with a POS kit that comes with a small footprint display bin topped with a header

“We actively demo an assortment of apples to customers in the front of the store so they can sample and keep shopping.”

— Jeff Fairchild, New Seasons Market

card, in-store sampling, retail display contest and an online consumer contest.”

The MAC assists retailers in marketing apples with a variety of promotions around themes such as “Locally Grown” in the fall and “Healthy Living” in January. “These programs provide signage, bag closures and sweepstakes prizes that differentiate our product as well as increase consumer excitement,” explains Smith. “In addition, we offer programs for some of our premium varieties such as Jonagold and Honeycrisp.”

To drive consumers into supermarkets for apples, Fowler Farm’s Peters says, “We are test marketing electronic billboards this season.”

The NYAA will launch “Abby for Apples.” This campaign features U.S. soccer star and Rochester native, Mary Abigail “Abby” Wambach, as the association’s celebrity ambassador for the state’s apples. Wambach will be featured in TV, radio, print and online advertisements as well as on POS signs for grocery, farm and green markets.

Marketers are also promoting apples from outside the store by using social media. For example, Domex is running a consumer promotion on Instagram whereby it requests the company’s retail partners and apple consumers to post photos of their favorite recipe, apple variety or healthy activity. Three monthly winners will be selected to receive a \$100 Visa gift card.

In addition, Chelan Fresh will launch the Disney Club Penguin (an interactive website hosting a virtual world targeting 6- to 12-year olds) promotion in January. Club Penguin has more than 5 million viewers. Kwik-Lok’s on bags of the company’s apples will provide kids with special codes to unlock certain parts of the playful website.

“If we want to grow apple consumption, we need to start influencing the eating habits of young kids rather than try to change the established tastes of teens and adults,” Chelan Fresh’s Riggan says. “This is why we partnered with Disney, as well as promote Fruitrition (a marketing program for retailers) and Fuel Up to Play 60.”

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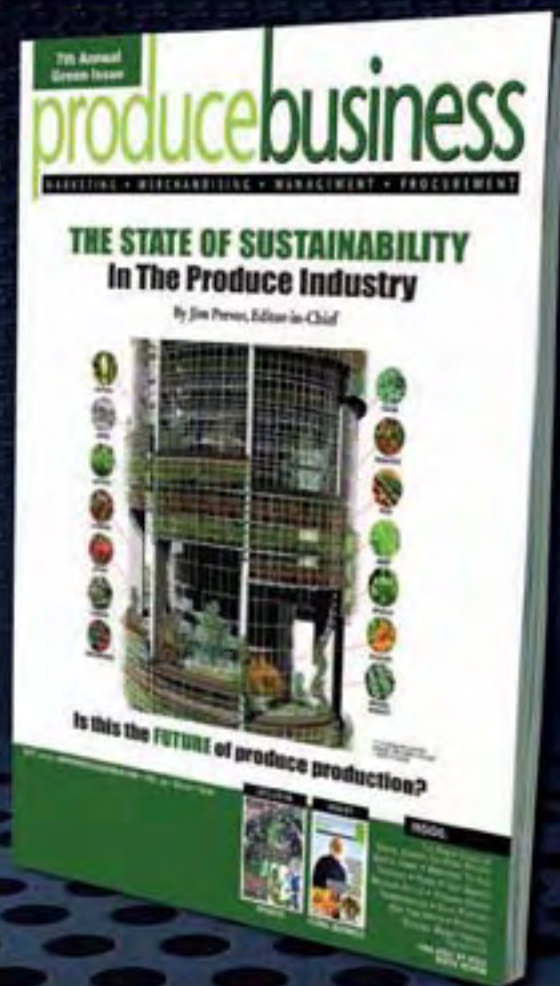
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Salad Trends Filter From Restaurants To Retail

Feedback from chefs and their customers bounces back to lettuce growers and salad processors, influencing new creations in the category. **BY BECKY BILLINGSLEY**



MANN PACKING CO., ARCADIAN HARVEST



CHURCH BROTHERS, RAINBOW KALE BLEND



TANIMURA & ANTLE, ARTISAN BLENDS



MISIONERO VEGETABLES, BABY KALE BLEND



DOLE, ASIAN BLEND

A recent study confirms that foodservice operators are moving away from traditional Romaine lettuce and experimenting with a wider selection of lettuce varieties.

Innovative chefs who want to make every course memorable are influencing salad ingredient suppliers and in the process creating something more — new lettuce and salad trends. Chefs, in turn, are influenced by what their customers want to eat, and those opinions effect major lettuce suppliers' new product decisions.

A recent study about consumer lettuce preferences commissioned by Salinas, CA-based Mann Packing Co. relied heavily on what restaurant customers said they prefer. The study, which was conducted by Chicago, IL-based consulting and research firm, Technomic, showed foodservice operators moving away from traditional Romaine lettuce and experimenting with a wider selection of lettuce varieties.

A case in point is the classic Caesar, which gets a twist in the kitchen of Adam Kirby, executive chef and partner at Bistro 217 in Pawleys Island, SC. He makes a deconstructed Caesar using whole petite red Romaine, onion with fresh hot bread on the plate, and dressing on the side.

In season, Kirby reaches out to local organic farmers, and this year he is particularly pleased about the availability of small lettuces, sized between micro and baby, such as the little red Romaine and the little green leaf lettuce. He also scoops up micro Arugula, and uses two to three pounds of micro greens daily.

"When you use these salad greens, you want to think, 'What is the taste experience?'" he says. "Arugula — that's a spicy feeling and a bitter feeling with a little crunch. Romaine, red leaf lettuces — they're a little softer. When you're cooking food for a lot of people, you can't take that chance about blowing their socks off without having balance."

Diana McClean, director of marketing at Tanimura & Antle, Inc., one of the largest marketers of lettuce, based in Salinas, CA, has just the product to fit Kirby's needs. The company's Artisan Lettuce clamshells contain four heads of a mixture of red and green ruffled Petite Oak, crunchy and sweet Petite Gem, and Petite Tango, which is an incised leaf Frisee with a sharp spicy flavor.

"The lettuces we offer in our Artisan

package are not baby lettuces, which tend to wilt more," McClean says. "These are mature. We wanted a more mature petite with a more developed flavor and texture."

At the Crossroads Restaurant in the Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill, NC, executive chef James Clark's salads often don't have lettuce as a main ingredient. He tends to finish fruit and vegetable salads as well as other dishes with greens, such as seared scallops with baby radishes, orange supreme, caviar and Arugula pecan pesto.

"The thing I see most is a lot more salads not just composed with lettuce but finished with it, like Frisee, Lolla Rosa and Arugula," says Clark. "I'm seeing more compressed fruits, nuts and dried fruits as the base of the salad."

A. Michael "A.T." Toroyan is the chief operating and development officer at Tossed, a Ft. Lauderdale, FL-based quick service chain specializing in creating made-to-order salads in less than a minute. "The hottest thing we're seeing is kale," he says. "Everybody is getting into using kale in different ways, and we're getting into a 'kalicious' menu. It's an amazing

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superfood.”

Pairing salad with entrees is nothing new, but putting salads directly on top of entrees is something Tossed is adding to its menu. Toroyan says the restaurant group will soon roll out flatbreads with salad as a topping choice.

The Proof Is In The Manifesto

Mann Packing's Technomic study lends credence to anecdotal information from restaurant operators mentioned above. Data was collected in May 2013 from 1,000 consumers of differing demographics who order salads at restaurants. Using information gathered in the study, Mann published *The Lettuce Revolution Manifesto*, which finds 83 percent of restaurant consumers make ordering decisions based on what type of salad greens are used. Additionally, 77 percent say the greens' nutritional value is “important or extremely important.”

According to Gina Nucci, director of healthy culinary innovation at Mann Packing, she and coworkers didn't know what to expect when they asked about consumers' satisfaction with restaurants' current selection of salad greens. “We were a bit surprised when they indicated

“The thing I see most is a lot more salads not just composed with lettuce but finished with it, like Frisee, Lolla Rosa and Arugula. I'm seeing more compressed fruits, nuts and dried fruits as the base of the salad.”

— Chef James Clark, Crossroads Restaurant

that they are unappealing. It was also surprising that kale didn't fall in the top five varieties. It ranked last below Iceberg lettuce.”

Iceberg may not have the trendy punch of newer leafy varieties, but Tanimura and Antle's McClean, says, “Iceberg is still popular for crunch and familiarity.”


In fact, Iceberg remains the No. 1 seller at Church Brothers/True Leaf Farms in Salinas, CA, according to Ernst Van Eeghen, director of marketing and product development. While Iceberg doesn't have the dense nutritional content of Romaine, spinach or kale, Van Eeghen says it's still healthy, and “... people are adding it more to their menus — which is good. Mainstream America might not be used to adding daily salads to their diets, so Iceberg is a great segue.”


Although Iceberg remains a top seller among producers, the Technomic study showed that restaurant salad consumers want more variety. Iceberg was listed as a salad “pet peeve” by a majority of consumer respondents due to its lower nutritional value when compared to darker greens. Two-thirds say they “... perceive salad greens with a darker color as more upscale or premium,” while 70 percent agreed, “curly/robust/leafy salad greens enhance the visual appeal of salad.”


Tanimura & Antle's response to the consumers' desire for the crunchiness of Iceberg, combined with the nutritional density of darker greens, is its Artisan Romaine. McClean says the product offers “the crunch of Iceberg with the nice compact head of Romaine,” as well as a variety of uses.

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Markus Eriksson, senior brand manager of product development at Dole Fresh Vegetables in Monterey, CA, says his company's most recent research shows "... consumers want a savory, flavor-forward experience that goes beyond the ordinary. They want their salads to be memorable and even fun to eat. For many, this translates into demand for chopped salad and the opportunity to enjoy

layers of flavor, texture, color and crunch in every bite."

Additionally Eriksson says consumers expect chopped salad to be more filling than regular salad kits and blends, offer unique ingredients, bite-sized pieces, and be "green enough" to be considered guiltless.

Give 'Em What They Want

In response to consumer research, the new Dole Chopped Salad line was introduced at the retail level starting in mid-September. It

"People are becoming a little more selective. They want more than just greens on their plates. If they are going to put out a little extra money for a value-added product, then we give them what they want."

— Dan Canales, Misionero Vegetables

includes three all-natural salad kits and two chopped salad blends.

All of the chopped salad kits and blends contain red and green cabbage with the additions of Romaine or kale, or both.

Mann Packing worked to enhance its Iceberg and Romaine foodservice offerings with its Arcadian Harvest lettuce varieties introduced in late 2011. The new varieties offer a blend of European lettuce species bred from various combinations of Green leaf, Red leaf, Tangos, Lolla Rosa, Batavia and Oaks lettuces.

"The Arcadian Harvest package offers an upscale appearance with multidimensional lift and vibrant colors that not only enhance the visual appeal of the salad greens but also improve the perception of their nutritional value," says Nucci. "Taste, color, texture — those are the three most important trends in salad," she adds.

Arcadian Harvest Ruby delivers those requirements with a "distinctive blend of red and green sweet crisp Frisee lettuces paired with Red Butter Salanova lettuce. The combination of color, flavor and texture gives any dish an upscale appearance and eating experience," Nucci says. "This blend, with its bite-size, whole red butter leaf, portrays an heirloom salad appeal."

Producing "nutritional powerhouse" lettuces and greens is the goal of Misionero Vegetables in Gonzales, CA. "People are becoming a little more selective," says vice president of sales and marketing, Dan Canales. "They want more than just greens on their plates. If they are going to put out a little extra money for a value-added product, then we give them what they want."

Nutritional value and appealing flavors are what help spur Misionero's new baby kale and mixes like Lemony Blend with baby lettuces

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“Our success over the past several years has been the partnership with end users to help them grow that produce category and be more than just a supplier.”

— Ernst Van Eeghen, Church Brothers/True Leaf Farms

and citrus-flavored herbs; the Superfood Blend with baby kales, spinach and chards; and a Wasabi Arugula Blend incorporating the peppery and bitter zest of rocket lettuce with the mellowness of spinach and sweet lettuces.

“We do taste tests fairly early on,” Canales says. “We take off our Misionero hat for a moment and put on our consumer hat. Would we buy this? Would we pay our hard-earned dollars and bring this home for our family to enjoy more than occasionally?”

It takes a couple of years for Church Brothers/True Leaf Farms to develop a new lettuce, according to Van Eeghen. That’s the case with its red-colored Heirloom Spinach, released in 2012.

“Its flavor and color are really exclusively ours,” Van Eeghen says. “We’ve been playing with it for a long time, as a salad and also as a

cooking vegetable, because it holds its color nicely. With a natural color agent, you can do all kinds of interesting things with it like red pasta, red spinach dip, gnocchi, mashed potatoes, steamed or sautéed spinach. It’s a great way to drive color into fairly mainstream items.”

When developing new products, Church Brothers also enlists help from its customers, who are corporate chefs at national restaurant chains, and from the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) campus in Napa Valley (St. Helena, CA). The company asks chefs what they need to achieve the color, crunch, flavor and plate appearance they’re looking for, and then they take that information to the CIA to compare those needs with studies and menu analyses.

Church Brother’s Italian Greens blend,

which features baby black kale, baby scarlet kale and wild arugula, was developed using this process. Van Eeghen says it’s a classic Tuscan-style salad, adding that the Italians traditionally add chicory to their salads.

Recently, Church Brothers introduced a Rainbow Kale Salad using a variety of kales. “We’re going to be seeing more unique blends like that,” Van Eeghen says. “I think there’s going to be a trend in that direction. The foodservice industry is becoming more adventurous.”

“We don’t want to throw it to our customers and say, ‘You figure it out,’” Van Eeghen says. “The CIA helps us, teaching us how to cook it, whether to use canola or extra virgin olive oil, etc. Moving into 2014, it’s going to be more important because our customers in the foodservice segment are asking us to develop more unique and proprietary products with color and flavor.

“Our success over the past several years has been the partnership with end users to help them grow that produce category and be more than just a supplier. The key for us is to have that engagement and interaction with our customer to develop new salads and produce.”

pb

Organic Berry Demand Increases

No matter what variety, suppliers see an incentive to grow the organic category, as sales increases of organic berries out-perform conventional sales by a wide margin. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**



Experts say that organic berries continue to grow and category volume ranks more than 34 percent higher from 2011 to 2012.

Consumption of organic berries is on the increase. Sales had been growing until a few years ago when the economy took a turn for the worse, and organic berry sales dropped. However in the past two years, the category is seeing a steady growth, according to Jim Grabowski, marketing manager, Well-Pict Berries, Watsonville, CA, a marketer of conventional and organic strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries.

"Increases in organic berry sales are almost double what we are seeing in the conventional berry category," reports Carmela Beck, national organic program manager for Watsonville, CA-based Driscoll's, a marketer of all major berry varieties, both conventional and organic. "The good news is the demand for organics is great across all of the varieties."

Albert's Organics, Inc., Swedesboro, NJ, markets a full line of organic strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. The company saw strong growth in the berry category over the past year. "Berries (all varieties combined) actually became our top selling category of fruit, edging out all varieties of apples. We are seeing the greatest sales growth with organic raspberries, but both strawberries and blueberries also remain strong," states

Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing.

Volume and availability of organic berries, and organic produce in general, continue to increase as the consumer demand increases. California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, markets the four major berry varieties, both conventional and organic, and is promoting the increased availability of organic strawberries this year. "Our organic acreage this season increased by over 50 percent. Strawberries remain dominant in the berry category, so organic is still on the rise for that berry type. Blueberries are a close second," says Cindy Jewell, director of marketing.

According to Fabrizio Casini, director of produce and floral at Hiller's Markets, an eight-store chain in Southfield, MI, "Organic berries are very popular with our customers and sales keep building. We carry all four major organic berry varieties. Strawberries are No. 1, followed by raspberries. We often have both organic and conventional strawberries on sale."

"There has been an increase in demand for all our organic berries, but especially strawberries and blueberries," says Robert Verloop, executive vice president, Naturipe Farms, LLC in Estero, FL, a marketer of all major berry varieties, both conventional and organic.

Organic Display Locations And Pricing Considerations

Once the organic berries reach the retail market, "there are two schools of thought on organic displays within the produce department, and we support both," says Jewell of California Giant Berry Farms. "We feel our retail partners select their preference based on their customer demographics."

Some retailers prefer to have a separate organic display within the produce department. This approach provides a destination for customers that are primarily organic shoppers to buy multiple organically grown items at once. Other retailers keep organic and conventional berries side by side with the thought that consumers looking for berries will go to a berry display within the department and then choose organic or conventional berries. This eliminates sending them to another area of the department to make a comparison.

"I have a hard time deciding which display area is preferable," Well-Pict Berries' Grabowski observes. "It appears that displaying the organic berries next to conventional berries is the best for sales. However, if a market has room, also offering them in a dedicated organic section is helpful to the market's organic customers."

"Retailers have their own display schemes,

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Organic Strawberries No.1 Among Organic Berries

The California Strawberry Commission in Watsonville, CA, generically markets all strawberries grown in California, regardless of variety or production methods. From the Commission's 2013 Acreage Survey Report, there are 40,192 acres of strawberries in California for this year. Of that amount 2,532 acres (6.3 percent) are planted in organic strawberries.

According to the same survey, over half (55.8 percent) of the organic strawberry production is in proprietary varieties. The second-most planted variety in organic acreage is Albion, a University of California variety, at 23.6 percent. All other varieties are less than 10 percent of the organic acreage.

Many of the conventional California strawberry growers are incorporating techniques used by organic growers, including hand weeding, and integrated pest management techniques, which use predatory or "beneficial" insects, plantings to attract "bad" bugs away from the crop or attracting "beneficial" bugs to the fields, bug vacuum, and

dust management. The growers are also using organically approved substances to manage fungus and mold.

The California Strawberry Commission funded and continues to fund millions of dollars in research to conserve resources and reduce the need for synthetic pesticides. "Over the past five years, the Commission funded research for non-fumigant alternatives to manage soil-born diseases and pests, which would benefit both organic and conventional growers," reports communications director, Carolyn O'Donnell.

The Commission and California Department of Pesticide Regulation announced in March 2012 a three-year \$500,000 partnership to take some of the fumigant alternative tests to field scale tests. This year, the Commission announced a three-year \$1 million partnership to create a Strawberry Sustainability Research and Education Center with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo State University. Both organic and conventional strawberry growers should benefit from this partnership. **pb**

but the main requirements are good refrigeration to maintain the cold chain and clear signage," Verloop of Naturipe Farms observes. "The displays should be built so both conventional and organic berries are easy to find. Twenty-five percent of consumers buy organic berries all the time, and 60 percent are occasional buyers. Attracting those 60 percent with larger displays of organic berries will result in bigger rings at the register."

Wish Farms, Plant City, FL, grows and markets organic strawberries from Florida and organic blueberries from Florida and Chile. "I have seen customers who displayed the organic berries beside the conventional berries have dramatic sales increases," says CEO Gary Wishnatzki. "It could be as much as ten times more berry movement. The berry market is still evolving, and I see lots of potential for organic berries."

According to Weinstein of Albert's Organics, "I'm a believer in having your complete selection of products together, both organic and conventional. The reason is that typically a retailer's conventional display is strong and prominently located. Shoppers tend to assume that whatever is being merchandised in the

berry display is the entire berry selection, and most will tend not to look elsewhere for organic berries. The exception is if retailers have done such a superb job of marketing their separate organic section that their shoppers know automatically to go there for any organic item."

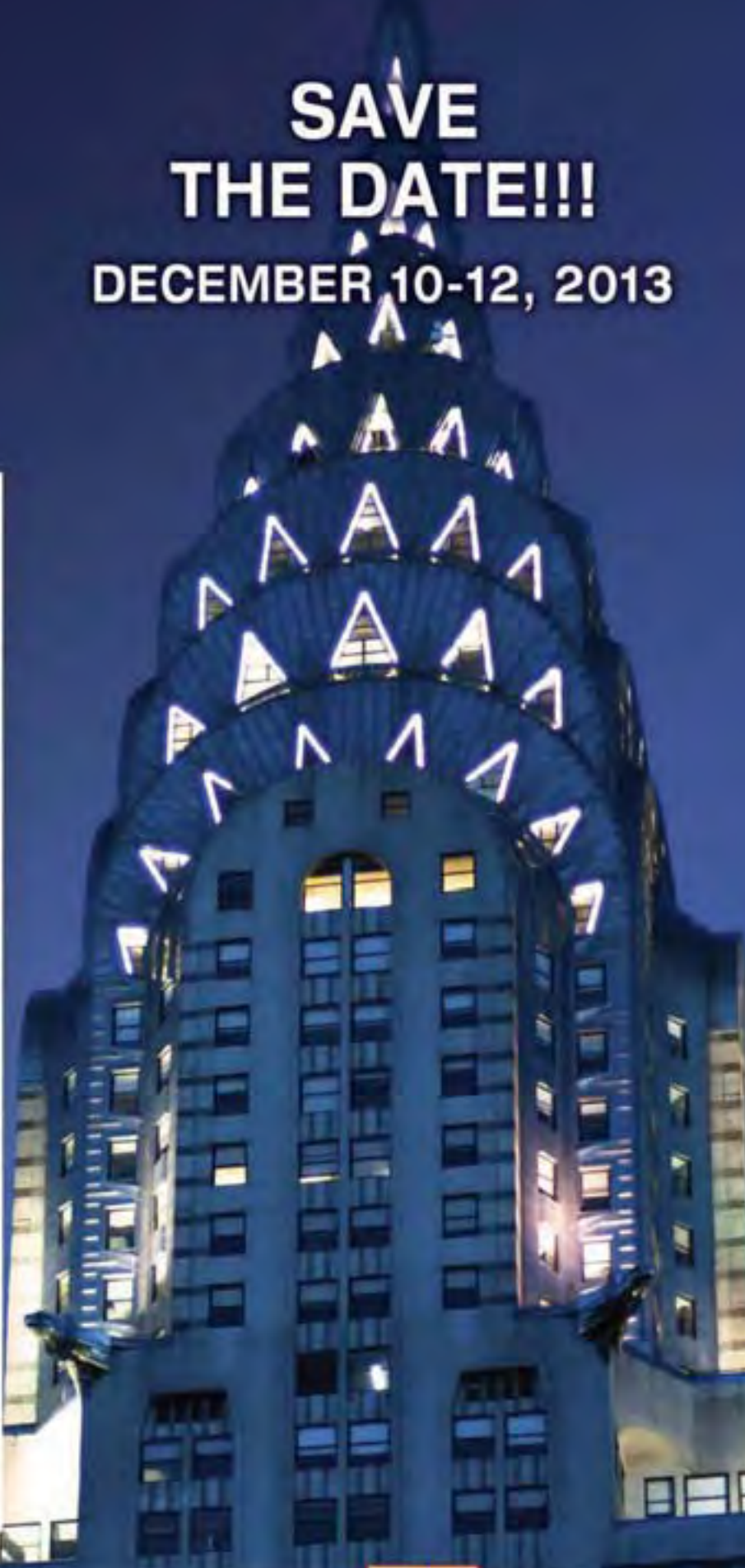
Jensen's Finest Foods, a three-store market chain headquartered in Palm Springs, CA, carries all four major organic berries. "We display them in our organic section and have been successful with them located there," explains produce buyer Jim Madala. "From time to time, we run ads or conduct manager's specials for the organic berries. We always post attractive signs calling attention to them and find our customers really like the organic berries. We have high standards for the produce we carry and only stock the berries if they meet our standards."

One of the concerns held by some is that organic berries are higher in price than conventional berries. However, as the economy picks up, it does not seem to be a real concern by those who want organically grown fruit. "There are extra costs in growing organic berries, such as the higher cost of land and getting less production per acre than with conventional



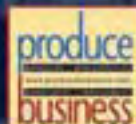
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berries,” states Verloop of Naturipe Farms.

“Organic berry prices are more stable than conventional berry prices and not as volatile,” adds Verloop. “Of course, much depends on the berry market in general and the volume of conventional berries available. Price differentials between organic and conventional berries can vary from 20 percent to 50 percent in some cases, respectively.”

Retail Sales Promotion Materials Available

Most of the suppliers work with their customers individually on sales promotional materials. Demographics play an important role in how each retailer handles organic products. It can vary among retailers and even between markets within the same chain.

“We do have point-of-sale (POS) material available for our customers, and we are very proud of our easily identifiable organic berry trays and clamshells,” says Driscoll’s Beck.

The California Strawberry Commission, out of Watsonville, CA, provides generic marketing materials, including posters, point-of-sale signs and recipe brochures, reports communications director, Carolyn O’Donnell. The materials also have QR codes that take smartphone users to the Commission’s website for recipes, nutrition information, and stories/videos about strawberry farmers.

According to Grabowski of Well-Pict Berries, “We find if our customers use any promotional materials, they use their own, but we work with them individually and will help them if requested. We are also on Facebook,

Twitter, and other social media and include our entire line in any promotional information.”

“Our organic berries speak for themselves,” states Beck of Driscoll’s. “The popularity of organic berries is such that regular advertising isn’t required from us to promote the wholesomeness, goodness and flavor.”

Albert’s Organics provide sales and promotional materials for organic berries, which can be downloaded from its website. In January, the company typically does a big and well received organic blueberry promotion. “We find people love a good berry promotion in the winter. It’s a little break from citrus, apples and pears. We provide signage, and retailers can use it as part of their marketing/merchandising efforts,” suggests Weinstein. **pb**

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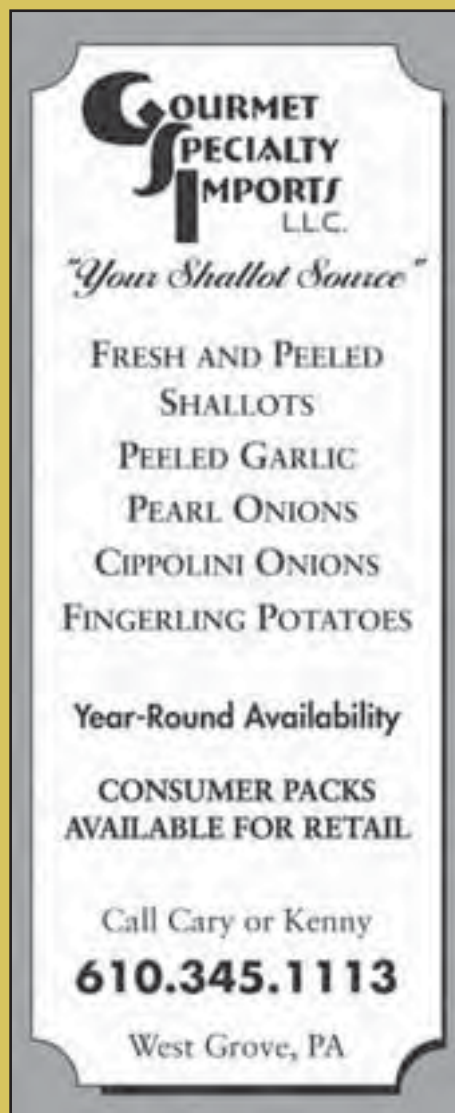
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Twin Cities Produce Scene On The Upswing



With a long-standing history of outpacing trends, Minneapolis/St. Paul's produce industry places emphasis on optimum food safety.
BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

Produce wholesalers and distributors in the Twin Cities are providing a wider scope of service and expanding their product lines for retail and foodservice while adapting to the evolving trends at buyer and consumer levels of the distribution chain.

While keeping their focus on food safety in the forefront, produce distributors are continuing to develop products, packaging and services that differentiate them from the competition. These wholesalers also concur that their centralized location in the Upper Midwest provides the added benefits of transportation cost savings to their customers.

The Twin Cities are home bases for some key national chains, such as Target Corporation and Supervalu Inc., which maintain the market's retail strength. Supervalu reportedly holds onto the largest retail market share in the composite region of Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth, with 44 percent of the total, according to the Shelby Report of the Midwest. Wal-Mart takes second place, with a reported 19 percent of the market share.

The region also has well established independent retailers who design each store to fit the demographics and ambiance of the

surrounding neighborhoods. Produce wholesalers agree that the combination of large and small retail customers keeps the market vibrant.

Diverse Market Segments

While the Twin Cities' strong Scandinavian influence remains prevalent, the region's diverse demographic profile provides a unique blend of cultures and ethnicity. According to a demographic overview of Minnesota in the *Minnesota Compass* (a social indicators project that measures progress in the state), the state is still not nearly as racially diverse as the nation, but its profile continues to change.

The most recent data shows about 23.7 percent of the state's residents are now persons of color, compared to only about 1 percent in 1960. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2000 and 2010, the state's population of color grew by 55 percent. Immigrants from 160 countries came to Minnesota during the past decade, according to a report from the University of Minnesota's College of Education & Human Development. Immigrants born in Somalia outnumbered all others, followed by those born in India,

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(L-R) Phillip Brooks and Nina Brooks Haag
H. Brooks & Co.



(L-R) Art Quiggle, Matt Hauge and Brian Hauge
Wholesale Produce Supply Co.

Ethiopia, and Mexico.

More than half of Minnesota's residents live in the seven-county Twin Cities region, with an estimated total population of 2.92 million. It is one of the fastest growing regions in the Midwest and is predicted to

continue its rapid growth — adding a half million more residents by 2030.

Savvy Twin Cities wholesalers are aware of the importance of answering to the needs in these various demographic segments. "Since things bottomed out in

2007, business seems to have been rebounding in recent years," notes Art Quiggle, vice president and head of tomato buying at Minneapolis-based Wholesale Produce Supply, LLC.

The unemployment rate appears to be

LOYAL PRODUCE FOLLOWING AT FESTIVAL FOODS

Small neighborhood atmosphere, locally grown emphasis and personal service make this retailer stand out among the giants.

By Sandy Lindblad Lee

Strong independent retailers in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region provide healthy competition for the larger chains based here, and Festival Foods provides a shining example.

Headquartered in Vadnais, MN, and operating in seven Twin Cities locations, Festival Foods stores frequently offer customers a wider selection of products than larger chains, while maintaining a small neighborhood atmosphere with personalized customer service. The produce department is the primary reason this independent chain maintains its loyal following, according to Rod Borden, director of produce for Festival Foods.

Owned by Knowlan's Super Markets Inc., Festival Foods is in under the same corporate umbrella as two Knowlan's Food Markets, with locations in Maplewood and South St. Paul. Each store is designed to fit the demographics and ambiance of the surrounding neighborhood.

The Hugo, MN, Festival Foods store provides an attractive example of how effectively the company showcases the produce department as a tool to maintain customer loyalty.

When walking into the Hugo store, customers immediately are drawn to the produce department, which is located near the main entrance. Attractive displays of conventional and organic produce from around the globe create impulse purchases, and produce associates are visible to answer any questions and help with making selections.

Locally grown produce was important to customers in this region for years before its recent popularity surge across the nation. Today's trend to gravitate toward products grown close to home makes it an even more critical component of this retail operation. Borden points out another reason locally grown produce continues to draw shoppers' attention, "When you can attach a specific city or town to your product, it creates more excitement," he notes. "When consumers see familiar names on the produce, they can trigger fond memories of locations where they might have vacationed with their families."

With the Twin Cities' centrally located near several growing areas, shoppers are provided with fruits and vegetables in season throughout the summer and fall from nearby states of Wisconsin and Michigan in addition to Minnesota's produce. Adding even more atten-



tion to detail, Festival Foods provides added assurance to its customers that its locally grown fruits and vegetables are as safe as product that is attained from corporate farms.

One of the reasons for this is Festival Foods' primary supplier, produce wholesaler H. Brooks & Co., based in New Brighton, MN. "H. Brooks helps many of the farmers get third-party certification through the Food Alliance," Borden explains. He is referring to the Midwest Food Alliance, based in Minneapolis and a division of the Portland, OR-based National Food Alliance, which is a 10-year old national nonprofit that provides third-party certification of sustainable agricultural and food handling practices.

Back at each retail outlet, Borden makes sure that his produce staff is well versed on the ever-changing dynamics of the produce world and that experience is put to good use. "Most of our produce managers have 20-plus years of produce experience," he points out.

For the peak of freshness, Borden and Festival Foods' buyers adapted to the European style of distribution. "We bring in only what we need for that day," says Borden. H. Brooks provides just-in-time delivery, which reduces shrink.

pb



Jim Hannigan
J&J Distributing Co.

very low, which is reflected through Wholesale's efforts to find help. "We just can't find enough people — especially truck drivers," adds Brian Hauge, president of Wholesale Produce.

Surprisingly, while the economy works toward a full recovery, several in the produce distribution business report increasing demand for fresh-cut produce selections.

Fresh Cut, Value-Added And Food Safety

Minneapolis-based G.O. Fresh, a premier processor of fresh pre-cut fruits and vegetables, creates proprietary and customized blends of specialty salads, salsas, vegetable medleys and fruit combinations. G.O. Fresh's product line extends to over 700 SKU offerings from its centrally located facility in the heart of Minneapolis, according to Marylou Owen, chief operations officer.

Whatever the product, food safety remains a priority. "It starts with our own buyers purchasing good product and continues to be monitored every step along the way as it passes through our operation," says Owen. "We also make sure our employees go through good food safety training. We have a quality assurance manager and three Q.A. technicians who report directly to me."

Among its range of foodservice customers, G.O. Fresh supplies both low and high-end restaurants. Owen says the demand for these value-added produce options is on the upswing, and patrons appear to be returning to restaurants. "The restaurants I go to always seem to be full," she notes. "Business has come back up and seems to be continuing to go in the right direction."

Phillip Brooks, president of New

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WHAT'S NEW IN THE TWIN CITIES

By **Sandy Lindblad Lee**

Wholesale Produce Supply LLC, Minneapolis, MN. Adding a new dimension to its products and services, the company now operates a full-scale, fresh-cut produce processing operation. Conveniently located a few blocks from its headquarters, the fresh-cut division produces a wide variety of fresh-cut fruits, vegetables, salads, and dips. The expansion was made possible through the acquisition of the assets of a local processing facility.

"It was a great fit for us," notes Brian Hauge, president of Minneapolis-based Wholesale Produce Supply, LLC. "It allowed us to further integrate our buying practices and options with our vendor partners. It provides one more avenue for which our customers can do one-stop shopping from us. Our products are packaged to order, with next-day delivery."

Packed under the company's "Harvest Cuts" label, Wholesale Produce also offers private-labeling services. "Without an extensive transportation and delivery network already in place, we can make it that much fresher and more cost-efficient for customers," says Hauge.

Fresh-processed items are sold to wholesalers and distributors of foodservice and retail. Processed lettuce, cut vegetables, fruit trays, taco salad, and seven-layer salad are examples of the more popular items.

The fresh-cut division is the second major acquisition for Wholesale Produce during this past year, as it became the owners of Big Lake, MN-based Hull Potato Co. in August. According to Hauge, this division has officially changed its name to Wholesale Produce Supply Co. as well. In addition to its potato repacking capabilities, the Big Lake facility has ample storage to allow for additional procurement of potato supplies from all regional growing areas.

Packing options will include all consumer-sized poly bags as well as cartons in russet, red, and yellow varieties. "We offer some specialty potato varieties as well," Hauge adds, noting that Hull Potato Co. had been in business over 50 years prior to the acquisition by Wholesale Produce.

In nearby Canada, Wholesale Produce opened a tomato packing facility in Winnipeg (in Manitoba, Canada), in June. The company had already operated a sales office in Winnipeg, but the tomato packing is a new addition to its Canadian operations. A new local sales representative, Kevin Stobbe, "will spearhead the tomato packing operation, which should be fully operational by the fourth quarter of this year," Hauge reports. Shari Keeler, an eight-year member of the sales staff in Winnipeg, has also relocated to the tomato facility. The company bought a Compac color sorter and sizer for the Winnipeg division.

Back at the headquarters in Minneapolis, Wholesale Produce rolled out new packaging for retail in the "Harvest Crisp" label "all with the flexibility of providing 'grab and go' items for the time-pressed consumer," explains Art Quiggle, vice president and head of tomato buying of Wholesale Produce. "The items are flying off the shelves. The new packaging variety ranges from 6 ounces to 2 pounds, including stand-up, display bags that are resealable and packed to order."

While sales in several other commodities enjoyed gains in recent years, tomatoes are still the largest volume item for Wholesale Produce.

H. Brooks & Co., New Brighton, MN. This company, celebrating 108 years of operation, is enjoying phenomenal growth in its several divisions, which provide expanded variety and convenience to its customers. "Our different value-added divisions are doing very well," says Phil Brooks, president.

Brooks' caramel apple division is commemorating its 55th year of making its own caramel apples. Last year, the company updated its caramel recipe, which earned favorable reviews. "We brought back some of the basic elements that we originally used to give its classic flavor," Brooks explains. At the same time, the company removed some ingredients that have become common allergens.

Brooks features both the traditional line

Brighton, MN-based H. Brooks & Company, agrees. He partners with Cut Fruit Express of Inver Grove Heights, MN, a fresh-cut fruit and vegetable operation owned by Lawford Baxter. In addition to offering fruits, vegetables, onions and potatoes, Cut Fruit Express creates customized salads and specialty mixes, ranging from coleslaw to pot roast mix.

"Special attention to detail regarding food safety measures is always critical in the process, whether whole produce or fresh-cut," Brooks adds. "We put every fresh fruit and vegetable we receive through a stringent visual inspection for appearance and color. Fruits are further analyzed for texture and sweetness."

Wholesale Produce now meets its customers' fresh-cut needs through its newest division — a fresh-cut produce

processing operation it opened in June after acquiring the assets of a local processing facility. The facility produces a wide variety of fresh-cut fruits, vegetables, salads, and dips. As with its other divisions, "We follow the strictest protocol relating to optimum food safety measures," says Hauge.

J&J Distributing Co., St. Paul, MN, has offered its customers a full line of fresh-cut produce for several years and has its fresh-cut operation in a separate area inside the massive company headquarters. Owner Jim Hannigan emphasizes J&J maintains strict adherence to critical food safety measures.

Outside of the fresh-cut realm, produce providers in the Twin Cities region agree that food safety is critical in every aspect of the distribution chain. Wholesale Produce, reportedly the largest produce wholesaler in the Upper Midwest, maintains a food

safety program "which is leaps and bounds above our competitors," says Hauge. "We have full traceability on our produce, and we also send our food safety employees to special audit courses. We also remain active on industry committees relating to food safety," emphasizes Hauge.

"We are not stopping at where the government says we should be; we go beyond that," Hauge adds. "We already have policies in place for social responsibility at our facility and are making sure the people we deal with are doing the same. Our lot traceability system was developed five years before the government mandate was issued in December of 2005."

H. Brooks & Co.'s Brooks also points out the emphasis on food safety. "We've had our HACCP plan in place for years, which we constantly update. We had top ratings

and the “Celebration” selections. Nina Brooks Haag, in sales and marketing for Brooks, explains that the “Celebration” line includes upscale, gourmet items such as “the Decadent,” which is dark chocolate rolled in caramel, coated with pecans, more dark chocolate, and white chocolate.

Phillip Brooks also reports that customers responded well to the change in the “Caramel” label design. “We went back to the retro-type label that helps bring customers back to the time when caramel apples began to be popular,” says Brooks.

Another value-added operation is Brooks’ onion and rutabaga repacking and distribution division — Brings Co. “Brings is one of the oldest onion packing and distribution companies in America,” Brooks says. “They have been a leader in the onion business and operating since 1932.” A new onion-packing area was completed inside the massive H. Brooks facility, and the operation now has five repacking lines in place for all sizes of consumer packs.

The company plans to launch some new package options this year, although Brooks said the details had not yet been finalized. “We have come up with some new items that are great for grilling and tie in with helping customers make more healthy eating choices,” he explains. Examples include a variety of vegetable blends, which are sold at retail under the H. Brooks & Co. brand.

Brooks also features a full line of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables from Cut Fruit Express.

Lawford Baxter, president and owner of Cut Fruit Express, continues to expand his company’s selections available in fresh-cut. “He has an active research and development team working to develop new products for customers,” Brooks says. Baxter holds a Ph.D. in post-harvest physiology from the University of Minnesota.

“We put in a community garden right on the property,” explains Baxter. Over 50 individual gardens were planted on the plot of land. “We provide the tilled soil and water, and the employees do the rest.” Baxter made selling produce more than just a trade — he also uses it as a means to create a solid workforce by offering the space for growing his or her own fruits and vegetables. The employees filled the plots with their favorite fresh produce, including those that are hard to find in U.S. supermarkets and those that reflect their heritages. Some are immigrants from several Asian countries and from Mexico. Over half of the 60 workers are participating in the garden. Most bring home the fruits and vegetables to their families, but they also share with coworkers.

G.O. Fresh, Minneapolis, MN. The fresh-cut produce specialist completed a 15,000-square-foot addition to its operations near downtown Minneapolis. Brent Beckman, director of sales and marketing, reports the added space will allow for “expanded production for fresh-cut product and the manufacture of food ingredients.”

G.O. Fresh is also working with a potato

grower in North Dakota on a new variety of potato that can be fried without blanching. “The new variety will absorb less oil during the frying process,” Beckman explains. “In addition to potentially being a healthier French fry, restaurants will save on fryer oil.”

Marylou Owen, chief operating officer, notes that the increase in sales of several of the company selections is a reflection of the ongoing trend for people to choose healthier food options. Shaved carrots, cut romaine and radicchio, are three items that have been stand-outs, but Kale is emerging as a surprising, healthy alternative. “Our shredded kale salad is very popular,” says Owen. “Kale can also be sautéed, or used as an ingredient in a smoothie — adding anti-oxidant benefits to a delicious and healthy blended drink.”

J&J Distributing Co., St. Paul, MN. The company’s Hydroponic Urban Farm, located on Rice Street in downtown St. Paul and adjacent to the J&J Distributing headquarters will be opening soon, according to Jim Hannigan, president. Groundbreaking for the 38,000 square-foot greenhouse was held last summer. Hannigan and Paul Lightfoot of Bright Farms, New York, NY, announced that their partnership will initially produce a spring mix, baby kale, and baby arugula. “It will all be locally grown here in St. Paul and then packed and distributed by J&J Distributing,” explains Hannigan. Bright Farms finances, builds, and operates greenhouses, partnering with supermarkets and distribution centers to sell locally grown, sustainable produce. **pb**

from ASI and all the other major food safety and security auditors. We have additional measures in place that far exceed any governmental mandates.”

Locally Grown Popularity Still Holds Strong

Still in consistent demand, locally grown fruits and vegetables remain among the hottest categories on the shelves of produce departments in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region. Various independent retailers and larger chains are capitalizing on that trend by displaying signage in produce departments featuring photos and stories about their local growers. Products from Minnesota and nearby Wisconsin and Michigan have consistently flourished in popularity when they peak during the summer and fall.

Festival Foods, headquartered in Vadnais Heights, MN, which operates nine outlets dispersed throughout the Twin Cities region, understands the appeal of locally grown. Offering a vast array of locally grown produce, while innovatively maintaining its small neighborhood atmosphere, Festival Foods earned a following through designing each store to fit the demographics and ambiance of the surrounding neighborhood.

Rod Borden, director of produce for Festival Foods, emphasizes that the gravitation toward produce that’s harvested close to home makes locally grown a critical component of the retail operation. Adding even more personal attention to detail, the company assures its customers that its locally grown fruits and vegetables are as safe as the produce that is sourced

from corporate farms. This is due in part to the diligence of Festival’s produce wholesaler H. Brooks & Co., notes Borden. [See *Loyal Produce Following At Festival Foods*, page 184.]

“We continue to support our local growers as much as possible, including home-grown produce in season but out of the Midwest growing regions,” says Wholesale Produce’s Hauge. “We have exclusive contracts with local growers for peppers, tomatoes, and other Minnesota-grown products.”

“Our local program has a broader base, with better access to areas we can quickly reach with our wide transportation network,” says Hauge. “Our ability to source product is better since we have delivery trucks throughout the Midwest, and we can haul local product back in a



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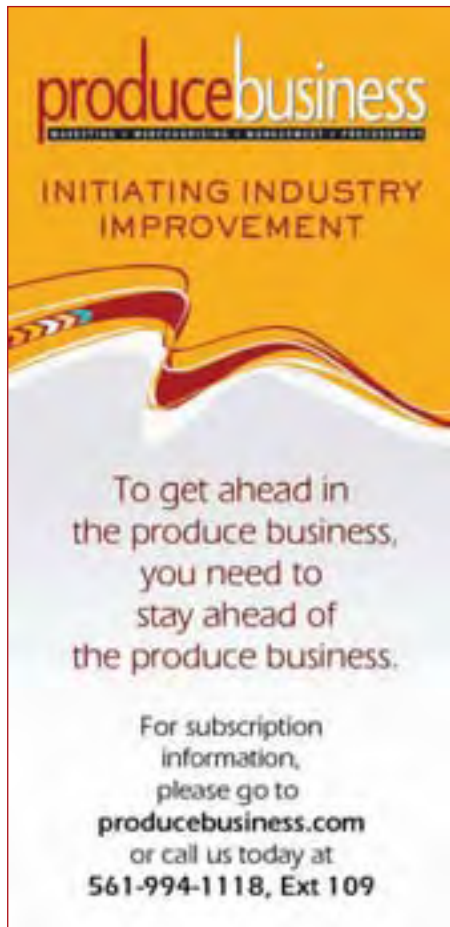
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more efficient manner. We have the luxury of bringing back product from smaller growing regions; it's easier and more cost-effective for us to procure the products and supply our customers."

"Americans are buying locally grown like never before," says H. Brooks' Brooks. "Consumers want to know where their food was grown, who grew it, and how." He notes that his company has "a long history of close relationships with farmers who harvest the most delicious and best produce. These farmers, many of whom are second- and third-generation, know their land and their craft." Sweet corn, peppers, zucchini, and eggplant are some of the more prevalent homegrown choices.

Long-operating Minneapolis-based cooperative, The Wedge Community Co-op, is known for featuring its locally grown product since its founding in 1974. "We have many local growers that we work with who supplied us for many years on an in-season basis," says Dean Schladweiler, head of produce. He emphasizes that consistency is key. "At least two times a year, we sit down with our growers and talk with each other. The feedback we get from them works to improve the end product for our customers continually."

Foodservice Sector

The majority of the produce wholesalers agree that the foodservice segment of the industry is strengthening. Although the "white tablecloth" restaurants seem to be holding steady, the mid-priced family-oriented restaurants seem to be gaining market share. And a wide array of ethnics is reflected through the diverse restaurants seen at numerous neighborhoods in the Twin Cities. One example is the popular Seven Corners area near downtown Minneapolis, adjacent to the University of Minnesota. Within one square block, one can choose among Indian, Asian, Italian, Southwestern, Thai, Mexican, and American restaurants.

"It seems that on-the-go consumers are still eating away from home as much as ever," surmises Brooks, adding that his company has become "a great logistics expert for foodservice, and we provide assistance as expeditors in packing and distribution for our foodservice customers." Ultimately, whether they are foodservice or retail customers, "people who sell through us get better bottom-line results," Brooks says.

"The Twin Cities consumers are becoming more educated and are looking for different varieties of produce. The first place they may see something new is at a restaurant that features unique types and cuts of produce through an artistic presentation on the plate," says Wholesale Produce's Quiggle.

"Although our customers are mostly retail, we are diversifying as we look toward the future, and we are moving more into foodservice," says J&J Distributing's Hannigan.

Standing Apart From The Competition

Whatever the customer base, providing services that make the companies stand apart from the competition is critical.

"Our 'secret sauce' here is that we help people grow their sales — and their bottom line, while delivering the healthiest, freshest, and safest produce possible," reiterates Brooks. "We partner with our vendors and with our customers to make us all better. We have a group of expert companies all working together to help grow everyone's business."

Brooks adds, "People who buy from us sell more produce, because we teach them how to merchandise better. We deliver the freshest products to our customers in the fastest time. Those factors, combined with our family-style approach to business, keeps us ahead of the competition."

Wholesale Produce's Quiggle notes that while the company has vastly increased its sales through the addition of several divisions and packaging services in recent years, it maintains its stronghold through the added dimension of its long-held leadership in the tomato category. The company's growth in its early history was attained through its tomato specialization, and that foundation remains strong. "Because of our vast supply base, we have the ability to react quicker to procure and deliver the freshest — and the widest selection — of tomato varieties available from local, national, and international sources."

"Quality control is so imperative when outlining how the company stands apart," says G.O. Fresh's Owen. "When it comes in the door, it is inspected by our receivers. If it doesn't meet our quality, we refuse it. Also, it is so critically important that our established, basic standard operating procedures regarding food safety and sanitation are followed."

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Industry Meets Pecan Challenges Head-On

When push comes to shove, the pecan industry gets creative to keep sales stable in Produce and give consumers what they want. **BY MICHELE SOTALLARO**



PHOTO COURTESY OF TROPICAL FOODS

Industry experts say that bulk pecan prices can range anywhere from \$4.99 to \$10 a pound.

It's been a bumpy ride for pecans over the past couple of years. In just 18 months (from July 2011 through January 2013), prices for both inshell pecans and meats dropped an average of 50 percent, according to a recent article written by Daniel J. Zedan, president of Nature's Finest Foods, Ltd., a Batavia, IL-based brokerage firm specializing in the marketing of tree nuts. A culmination of price, dry weather conditions and exports to China are the overarching reasons for this perfect storm of unfortunate circumstances for pecans.

Until 2007, pecans were primarily consumed in North America. The supply was plentiful and the exports were limited. During that same year, a short walnut crop resulted in higher walnut prices, and the second largest pecan crop in history shifted the balance of nut exports, according to Nature's Finest Foods. This event sparked interest from China and ignited a new purchasing philosophy whereby China cuts out the middle man (the sheller) and goes directly to the grower to buy product. The pecan industry and its future were immediately changed.

Retail prices for pecan meats increased to over 125 percent along with U.S. pecan exports to China — accounting for almost 30

percent of the U.S. crop. Throw in a severe drought throughout the pecan belt (the southern part of the U.S. that spans from California through Texas through Georgia — where most commercial pecans are grown) in 2011 and 2012, along with the natural affects of supply and demand, and we have a spastic crop with an uncertain future.

Rick Hogan, produce department supervisor/manager for the Grand Forks, ND-based Hugo's Family Market, says that, with the exception of roasted pecans, his store has "gotten away from selling fresh pecans in Produce due to the fact that cost is so high on them right now. So we're giving items to Grocery for them to focus on."

Hogan is researching and considering other options for selling pecans in Produce before committing to one supplier. His ideal scenario is to sell pecans in bulk within Produce because "just like any other produce item, people can relate more to freshness when it's not in a bag." But as it stands right now, Hugo's would have to sell pecans at a minimum of \$4.99 a pound for bulk — especially with higher margins in Produce — and "that, to me, is really high. Last year we were at \$4.68 a pound," explains Hogan.

As the growing season progresses, the pecan

trees in Texas and its neighboring states appear to be weathering the drought fairly well. Even though meat yields are down, overall production is not as detrimental as the industry speculated. Fearing the worst of U.S. pecan production from the drought, China focused its attention on South Africa to meet its demand for pecans. With China now fully stocked for its Chinese New Year, the U.S. pecan crop can benefit from a reprieve.

Prices In Limbo

"A year or two ago, China would take every pecan that the U.S. would export. China put a tremendous demand on all the nuts in the U.S., which is still driving up price," says Larry Griffith, Midwest business manager for Mariani Nut Company, Winters, CA. "Now the market has really softened up on pecans; growers had some good crops for a change, so the industry will start pushing more pecans because prices are down."

Vickie Mabry, executive director of the National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA), Atlanta, GA, agrees with Griffith. "Prices have fluctuated because of supply and demand issues. Changing weather conditions impacted supply, and demand was impacted by overseas orders — primarily from China."



Nut Company out of St. Paul, MN — some of which are raw, so the pecans can be roasted on their own to create healthier roasts (since some varieties come with lots of salt)."

"Most of what we sell is shelled pecans," says Chad Hartman, director of marketing at Tropical Foods, Charlotte, NC. "During the holidays, we do get inshell requests. The majority of what we hear on the

consumer side is requests for pecans for the classic pecan pie. On the foodservice side, we'll hear about chefs flavoring pecans a certain way and using them as a garnish on a protein. Or I've seen examples where they are used for unique desserts. We do sell a little bit of pecan meal."

NPSA's Mabry says that pecans are a great baking alternative for health-minded shoppers. "Consumers are growing increasingly health-conscious, so it's important to market

John Robison, chairman of the Georgia Pecan Commission, Atlanta, GA, is optimistic about the future of pecans and believes that the industry is taking some new precautions. "Pecan trees tend to alternate bare, meaning a large crop is usually followed by a smaller crop the next year," explains Robison. "However, with new varieties being planted along with new cultural practices, alternate bearing may become less of a problem in the future."

Overcoming Adversity

Even though trying times might take sacrificial stabs out of sales, adversity forces the industry to get creative with its defense tactics. Whether the choice is to go from bulk to bagged, or inshell to shelled, or developing new recipes, retailers, marketers, packers, are confronting the challenges and finding ways to give consumers what they want in the way of pecan consumption.

"For about six to eight years, the bulk of pecan shipments in Produce were done in the last quarter of each year," says Mariani's Griffith. "Now shipments are fairly regular because of salad-topper usage in addition to baking."

"Though inshell has a presence in the produce section, the majority of the pecans we sell are shelled," says NPSA's Mabry. "Merchandising the products, especially with displays, helps increase sales."

"Retailers want shelled pecans because they are ready to use and convenient," says Georgia Pecan's Robison. "We find that bagged pecans in a 12-ounce size are popular, as well as the 16-ounce size."

"We offer bagged varieties, but no bulk options," says Maria Brous, director, media and community relations at Publix Super Markets, Inc., based in Lakeland, FL. "We do offer halves and pieces as well. All of our stores offer the [Valdosta, GA-based] South Georgia Pecan Company halves and pieces in Produce."

"We do sell a fair amount of roasted pecans in our bulk section," says Hugo's Hogan. "We have a bulk set of pecans from Bergin Fruit and

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DRIED FRUITS AND NUTS

this idea and the many ways pecans can be incorporated into the daily diet. For instance, pecans can be made into pecan flour, which is a great flour alternative for those who have celiac disease or those who wish to decrease their gluten consumption.”

Pecan Marketing Advantages

Like many nuts, pecans are recognized for their health and wellness support — especially heart-health benefits.

“The Georgia Pecan Commission has been promoting the health benefits of Georgia pecans for several years,” says Robison. “Georgia pecans have been certified by the American Heart Association as a heart-healthy food. Pecans also contain the highest level of antioxidants of any tree nut; plus they are rich in vitamin E, zinc, fiber, and heart-healthy monounsaturated fats.”

The Heart Check-Mark from the American Heart Association “designates pecans as heart-



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healthy when consumed as part of a healthy eating pattern,” says NPSA’s Mabry.

The healthy messages also open a gateway for display and promotional opportunities in-store.

“I think attractive signage, and perhaps some sampling, would help increase retail sales,” suggests Georgia Pecan’s Robison. “Also, having health information on hand describing the many health benefits of pecans would be beneficial in increasing sales.”

“We incorporate the ingredients in our recipes through secondary displays and inline,” says Publix’s Brous. “Some of our recipes (for example: sweet potato hash, pecan crusted tilapia, spiced nuts, and praline chicken) may call for the use of pecans or suggest a nut variety of the customer’s preference.”

“We add recipes and product knowledge to our displays to accompany sales,” says Tropical Foods’ Hartman. “We like to give retailers a promotion — especially during the holidays. If the ‘red tag’ or store card is attached to that product, then that’s always a plus.”

“We offer recipes and do recipe cards with the displays,” says Mariani’s Griffith. “We try to participate in tie-ins with events that the retailer may have going on. We have half a pallet that retailers can bring in and cross-dock to stores. It’s shrink-wrapped, and all the retailer has to do is pull the shrink wrap off.”

“The goal of ours is not only to offer attractive packaging, but also easy-to-handle and easy-to-display merchandisers,” adds Griffith. “The simpler we make things for the retailers, the more likely they are to put product out.”

Hugo’s Hogan suggests cross-merchandising to boost pecan sales. “Bring in a value-added shelled program. Even if the bags and shelled merchandise are from a different department, bring pecans in and display them proudly — giving the product exposure, so you can gain the extra item in the cart.”

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“RULES OF RETAIL”

(PART I)



During my career in retail, I have had the fortunate pleasure to meet and talk with some of the most successful pioneers in retail. The conversations that I had the opportunity of experiencing with these “Retail Giants” left a profound impression on me. I am inspired by the individual brilliance and simple methods that generated much of their successes. Those experiences provided

me with a set of “rules” that I used successfully in all my retail endeavors. Today, these “rules” seem to have been forgotten or disregarded by most management in retail, especially in the grocery world, and the produce industry. This is yet another case where upper management “just doesn’t get!”

After reviewing the present-day situations in our industry and discussing what needs to be done with various retail minds (along with suggestions from the supplier community), I decided to relay the “Rules of Retail” that have guided me throughout my career.

Rule #1: Top Line Sales are the Lifeblood of Retail: This is the most universal truth in retail. Anyone who claims that this is not the No. 1 priority for a retail operation does not know a thing about retail. Everything flows from sales. Nothing is possible without sales, and no enterprise can continue successfully without increasing sales.

It seems that in the present world of grocery retail, especially in produce, overwhelming emphasis is placed on increasing margin and demanding more margin. The conundrum here is the fact that by stressing margin, you actually decrease sales because of the upward pressure that increasing margin puts on prices. Increasing prices slow sales requiring increased margin — sacrificing more sales to satisfy profit requirements. This is a vicious cycle in which many grocery retailers and their produce operations find themselves circling. Unless reversed, the scenario cannot end well.

The proof behind this “rule” is the success of various retailers across the country. They have made driving sales their top priority and focus of their organization. We all know who these operations are — they are always leaders in overall increased sales and main-

taining store sales. They constantly develop strategies that entice their customers to buy more and attract new customers to come in and buy. This is not rocket science; it is simply the ability to focus on using the first rule of retail.

Rule #2: You Can’t Take Percentages to the Bank: This second rule was discussed in an earlier column; however, it is a key aspect of retail operations. Present emphasis on hitting a percentage target for margin and/or profit misses the point. The point is that dollars are what go into the bank and generate profits for the enterprise. The use of percentages has been adopted by management as a benchmark for measuring the success of the produce operation. While the use of percentages as a target can be useful, the importance of generating the actual dollars far outweighs the percentage target. This concept was emphasized to me in every conversation I had with the “Retail Giants,” and each of them had a story about the folly of using percentage targets versus dollar goals.

Rule #3: You Cannot Save Yourself into a Profit: This is another rule that shows the importance of Rule #1. Many retailers fall into the trap of trying to cut costs to generate profit. While cost control is an important part of retail operations, it should not be the overriding focus. Many retailers will cut anything — including labor, product selection, and space allocation — to lower

overall costs and generate profit. This is a simple illusion; in reality, by cutting costs you restrict sales and you artificially generate profit. This is another brutal cycle. By restricting sales, one drives up the need for more margin and higher prices along with the need for additional cuts to maintain a cost reduction strategy. The more cuts you make, the more it negatively affects sales. Once again, this is a strategy that starts down a slippery slope and does not end in success.

Occasionally some retailers employ this strategy to bump up the value (stock price in publicly held companies) to provide an artificial value for the company that is a target for acquisition. While this makes the shareholders happy, in the case of an acquisition — or sometimes scares away a suitor — it leaves the overall operation in disarray for the new owner, or the continuing management, to try and correct.

In Part II of this discussion, we will review the remaining rules of retail that allow for continuing success and the establishment of a true retail philosophy.

pb

I am inspired by the individual brilliance and simple methods that generated much of the “Retail Giants” successes. Those experiences provided me with a set of “rules” that I used successfully in all my retail endeavors.

By Don Harris

Don Harris is a 38-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com



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CONVERSATION WITH AHOLD EUROPE'S GÉ HAPPE



From time to time, PRODUCE BUSINESS reaches out to importers and retailers in Europe to help exporters of U.S. produce items learn about the opportunities and challenges of shipping to Europe. This month, Gé Happe, European sourcing director for Ahold, the international retailing group based in the Netherlands, weighs in on his experiences as a direct importer of U.S. fruit.

Mr. Happe has worked for Ahold Europe for 31 years. He currently serves on PMA's Global Development Committee. Ahold operates 850 stores in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany under the Albert Heijn, Etos, Gall & Gall, and albert.nl banners; 285 stores are operated under the Albert/Hypernova banner in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the United States, Ahold USA operates over 770 stores under the Giant, Stop & Shop and Martin's banners. The company also owns Peapod, the online grocery service.

How long has your company been importing produce from the U.S.?

Ahold has been importing produce directly from the U.S. for 25 years or longer.

What items have been your primary imports from the U.S.? Has this changed over the years?

Our only items of significant imports are Ruby Red grapefruits from Florida and Diamond walnuts from California, both of which we have been directly importing for over 25 years. We do bring in small quantities of other items such as Ocean Spray cranberries and sometimes seize an opportunity as we did last year when we sold some U.S. Minneolas, which some importers had brought in to the Netherlands.

Why only Florida grapefruits? In the U.K., retailers do a large business with McIntosh and Empire apples, and in Scandinavia, they do quite a large business with apples and pears. Why aren't these items imported from the U.S. in your regions?

The Dutch customers have a strong preference for Dutch apples, because of their typical sweet/sour taste and loose structure. Imported apples are Granny Smith, Royal Gala, Fuji, Golden Delicious, Breaburn and Pink Lady. They all grow in our European winters in France and Italy. In counter-season, we import from Chile, South Africa and New Zealand.

Can you tell us about some of the relationships you have built over the years with U.S. export companies?

With Seald Sweet, we have a long term partnership with seasonal programs and quite stable prices. With Diamond, we have more of a trading relationship, with year to year deals. The same goes for Ocean Spray cranberries, which we have also imported directly over the past

two decades. Sometimes we buy some U.S. product through local importers, as I mentioned we did last year with the Minneolas.

Do you ever use the U.S. to do "fill-in" business, say if the broccoli crop in Spain is destroyed by bad weather?

No. So far we have not needed to use suppliers in the U.S. for these arrangements.

Do you deal with any U.S. companies that do not grow produce on American soil, such as Dole or Chiquita?

Yes, we work with Dole and Chiquita, Del Monte Fresh as well.

Driscoll's has established a European operation, and it grows its Jubilee strawberry in the U.K. It also grows berries in Morocco and Egypt as well as Spain. Do you buy any of this product? Is this a model by which U.S. growers could enter the European market?

We do not work with Driscoll's, mainly because Ahold sells all fruits and vegetable, with the exception of Chiquita bananas, under its own brands. We do have strong relationships with a couple berry suppliers from Spain and Morocco. In the Dutch growing season, we have growers that grow exclusively for Holland

Crop, a grower's organization of our service provider, Bakker Barendrecht, based in The Netherlands.

What trends have you seen the past 10 years in doing trade with the U.S.?

Less availability — due to less acreage of Florida citrus, higher prices, more difficulty covering all programmed supply, but our long-term relationships cover most of all problems in an open and constructive attitude.

This year, there was a harmonization of organic rules between the U.S. and Europe. Does this open any opportunities for U.S. organic produce producers to sell to Europe?

No, there is enough supply of organic produce from Holland and Europe.

Where do you see the future of trading with the U.S. produce industry and the various logistical hurdles?

No hurdles, only availability due to various crop diseases affecting exports is an issue. If availability is too low, we will have to look for alternative supply in Israel and or Turkey.

Few U.S. companies are certified under Europe GAP. Is this an obstacle to your purchasing from the U.S.?

Yes, but not if an equivalent food safety protocol is in place.

Does having a large American division help you in any way? Does Ahold's American division ever procure for you in the U.S., or do you always procure directly?

So far, the European and U.S. arenas of Ahold are not working together on an operational level.

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Mann Packing Company, Inc.	15	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadetoeasy.com
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Marzetti Company	173	614-846-2232	www.marzetti.com
Melissa's World Variety Produce, Inc.	96	800-468-7111	www.melissas.com
Michigan Apple Committee	164	800-456-2753	www.michiganapples.com
MIXTEC Group	58	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net
MJB Sales, Inc.	138	610-268-0444	www.mjbsales.com
Monte Package Company	81	800-653-2807	www.montepkg.com
Mooney Farms	49	530-899-2661	www.moneyfarms.com
Mother Nature's Choice	176	208-921-3852	
N&W Farms	89	662-682-7961	www.nandwfarms.com
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	17	609-292-8853	www.state.nj.us/agriculture
New York Apple Association, Inc.	159	585-924-2171	www.nyapplecountry.com
New York Apple Sales, Inc.	164	518-477-7200	www.newyorkapplesales.com
Nickey Gregory Company, LLC	109	404-366-7410	
Nokota Packers, Inc.	131	701-847-2200	www.nokotapackers.com
Northern Plains Potato Growers Assn.	130	218-773-3633	www.redpotatoes.net
The NPD Group	168	516-625-0900	www.npd.com
OPA	175	800-669-3169	www.lighthousefoods.com
PA Exotic Mushroom Sales	138	610-444-0275	
Paramount Citrus Association	33	213-612-9957	www.paramountcitrus.com
Paramount Citrus Association	67	213-612-9957	www.paramountcitrus.com
Pear Bureau Northwest	47	503-652-9720	www.usapears.org
Penang Nursery	151	407-886-2322	www.penangnursery.com
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	86	305-477-9906	www.theperishablespecialist.com
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	119	305-477-9906	www.theperishablespecialist.com
Peruvian Asparagus Importers Assn.	119	817-793-3133	
Pom Wonderful	38-39	800-380-4656	www.pomwonderful.com
Ponderosa Mushrooms	139	604-945-9700	www.ponderosa-mushrooms.com
Jerry Porricelli Produce	113	718-893-6000	www.porricelli.com
Pro Act, LLC	50-51	831-658-1961	www.proactusa.com
Produce for Better Health Foundation	201	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Produce Marketing Association	145	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Produce Marketing Association	197	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Progressive Marketing Group	119	323-890-8100	www.pmgstrategic.net
Red Blossom Farms	13	805-981-1839	www.redblossom.com
RockHedge Herb Farm	97	845-677-6726	www.rockhedgeherbs.com
Rosemont Farms Corporation	119	877-877-8017	www.rosemontfarms.com
Sambroil Packaging	78	800-563-4467	www.sambroil.com
O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	130	701-657-2152	
Silver Creek Software	58	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
Skyline Potatoes	143	719-754-3484	
Southern Produce Distributors, Inc.	88	800-866-YAMS	www.southern-produce.com
Southern Specialties	96	954-784-6500	www.southernspecialties.com
Southern Specialties	119	954-784-6500	www.southernspecialties.com
Spice World, Inc.	181	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Spice World, Inc.	23	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Spokely Farms	129	218-946-2825	www.spokelyfarms.com
Stellar Distributing, Inc.	105	559-275-8400	www.stellardistributing.com
Sun Maid	192	559-237-3893	www.valleyfig.com
Sun Pacific	93	213-612-9957	www.sunpacific.com
Sun-Maid Raisins	41	800-786-6243	www.sunmaid.com
SunFed	125	866-4-SUNFED	www.sunfed.net
Sunview Marketing International	104	661-792-3145	www.sunviewmarketing.com
Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc.	162	208-459-8064	www.symmsfruit.com
Tambo Sur	119	954-943-1572	
Tater Man, Inc.	88	813-707-0075	www.tatermaninc.com
Taylor Farms	171	831-772-6664	www.taylorfarms.com
Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	57	803-691-8000	www.gotarpless.com
Torrey Farms, Inc.	54	585-757-9941	
Tropic Moon	24	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
United Fresh Produce Association	71	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
United Fresh Produce Association	127	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The USA Bouquet Co.	153	786-437-6502	www.usabq.com
USA Pears	47	503-652-9720	www.usapears.org
Valley Fig Growers	192	559-237-3893	www.valleyfig.com
Ventura Foods LLC			
Marie's Salad Dressing	135	214-351-4443	www.maries.com
Village Farms	56	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
Vision Import Group LLC	19	201-968-1190	www.visionimportgroup.com
We Are Many Foundation	167	877-319-9613	www.wearemanyfoundation.org
Western Fresh Marketing	104	559-662-0301	www.westernfreshmarketing.com
Wholesale Produce Supply Co.	183	612-378-2025	www.wholesaleproduce.com
J. Roland Wood Produce	89	919-894-2318	www.jrwoodfarms.com
Yakima Fresh LLC	157	800-541-0394	www.yakimafresh.com



4 New PBH Industry Awards

PBH PRESIDENT'S CLUB

The President's Club recognizes industry leaders for their longstanding support of PBH. Honorees include: Del Monte Fresh Produce, Paramount Agricultural Companies, Produce Marketing Association, Seneca Foods Corporation, Sternitt Growers, and Taylor Farms.

SUPERMARKET DIETITIAN OF THE YEAR

This award honors individual supermarket dietitians and retail health and wellness staff for their support of PBH and the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® health initiative.

PBH AMBASSADORS AMBASSADOR EXCELLENCE

This program acknowledges individuals who actively advocate for and encourage others to support PBH and the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters brand and message.

Fruits & Veggies—More Matters SCHOOL FOODSERVICE ROLE MODELS AND CHAMPIONS

This award is given to school foodservice departments who demonstrate an outstanding commitment to the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters initiative, joining fruit and vegetable industry members and public health partners who have been honored with this award since 2007.

For more information:
PBHFoundation.org/get_inv



MONUMENTAL INNOVATION

It was January of 1969, and President Richard Nixon was beginning his first term in the Administration. At the time this photo was taken, the political climate was testy, but Americans were hopeful for Nixon. The produce industry knew that the administration's approach to taxes, prices, domestic problems, and its attitude toward consumerism would impact the direction of supermarket organizations.

The supermarket industry began showing signs of vanguard consumerism. After the strike patterns of 1968, Nixon vowed with his presidency to lead a renewed drive — to instill in businessmen the desire to build and rebuild.

Nixon actually knew quite a bit about produce and the supermarket experience. His father, Francis (Frank) A. Nixon, built their family ranch and ran a citrus farm on the surrounding land in Yorba Linda, CA. Eventually the farm's profits declined, and around 1922, the family moved to Whittier, CA, where the Nixon's opened a grocery store and gas station. By the time Richard reached high school, he was working lots of hours at the store since his older brother, Harold, was ill with tuberculosis.

An example of the progressive nature within the produce industry and the innovative spirit Nixon set out to encourage with his presidency is the tote bag to Nixon's left side in the photo.

"That is a Package Containers Home-Toter," says Scott Koppang,

director of marketing and sales for Package Containers, Inc. (PCI), based out of Canby, OR. "It is our Jumbo size tote (7¾ inches x 4¾ inches x 10 inches), and has our distinctive single handle."

The Jumbo Home-Toter will hold 8 to 9 pounds of oranges (or any variety of produce). It was designed for shopper convenience. "The tote design has just the right dimensions (base versus height); plus with the single handle, it forms a very stable container for holding a family-sized portion of odd-shaped produce," explains Koppang. "The single handle is comfortable for the consumer to carry (in one's hand or over the forearm) and is very easy to 'Flip to Fill.'"

Down in the very far right corner of the picture is a single handle of a bag that is filled with oranges. "If you look closely, there is printing on the handle, which is a unique capability of PCI," says Koppang. "We allow our customers to put logos, produce names, PLUs, etc., on the handle. This gives retail grocers a 'guaranteed brand impression' since the handle is the one place that a consumer must look in order to pick up the tote."

Koppang says that PCI bags rose out of the need for roadside stands to package produce for their customers. "At first, growers called our totes apple bags — and still do to some extent. In time, our Home-Toters brand evolved into a line of produce merchandising containers primarily used in grocery produce departments."

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